

SPRING
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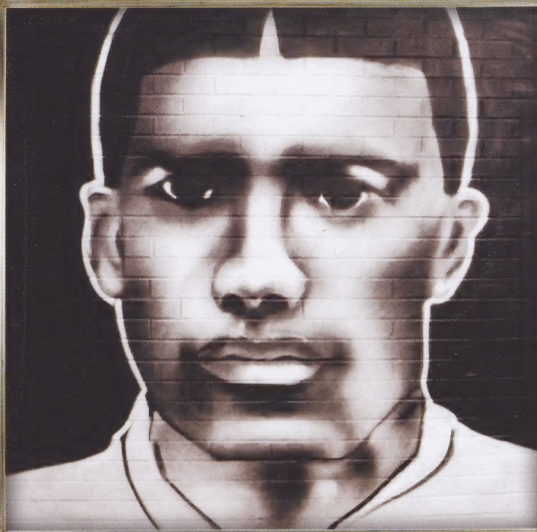
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DODGEM LOGIC



The stars are so big and the earth is so small. Stay as you are.

Great Hipsters In History



Great Hipsters In History

No. 22 : Walter Tull

Born in Folkestone, 1888, son of a Barbadian father and Kentish mother who both died early, Tull grew up in a Bethnal Green orphanage. Spotting his skills, Tottenham Hotspurs signed him in 1909 as the first professional black or mixed-race outfield player in British football. Racist taunts from away fans prompted him to leave the club in 1911, signing for Northampton Town. He was the first town player to enlist in WWI and became the British Army's first black officer, honoured for his 'gallantry and coolness'. Walter Tull was killed in action in 1918. His body was never recovered.



Great Hipsters In History

No. 23 : Charles Bradlaugh

Born Hoxton 1833 and atheistic from youth, Bradlaugh was elected as Northampton's M.P. in 1880, although only after eight years of struggle and local riots was he allowed to take his seat without swearing on the bible. A liberal individualist who supported trade unionism, women's suffrage, home rule for Ireland and the rights of then-colonised India, Bradlaugh was the lover of Theosophist Annie Besant, with whom he stood trial for distributing 'obscene literature' (actually contraceptive advice). Darwin refused to testify on their behalf. Dying in 1891, Bradlaugh's funeral was attended by many grateful Indians, including the young Mohandas Ghandi.



Great Hipsters In History

No. 24 : Lucia Joyce

Born Trieste 1907, arguably sole heir to James Joyce's talent, the Isadora Duncan-schooled Lucia became a modern dance sensation in 1920s Paris. Behavioural problems, possibly caused by early abuse, saw her categorised as schizophrenic and sent to various psychiatrists including an unhelpful Carl Jung. Her father died trying to extricate her from Nazi-occupied France and her mother and brother subsequently severed all contact. Lucia arrived in Northampton's St. Andrew's Hospital in 1951, where former lover Samuel Beckett visited her. Dying in 1982, interred in Kingsthorpe Cemetery, she is the dancing soul of *Finnegans Wake* and Northampton's most luminous hipster.

GREAT NEWS FOR READERS INSIDE!

For those of you not fortunate enough to have been born before 1960, the above phrase would appear suddenly on the front of your best-loved comic, and would clang in your young heart like a funeral bell. Inside would be an announcement that as of next week, you'd be able to get 'two great comics for the price of one!' What this meant was that the publisher was an alcoholic bankrupt reduced to sleeping in his car, and that your favourite periodical (let's say it was boy's picture weekly *Spurt*) was being merged with something you wouldn't read if they paid you (perhaps the inferior publication for toddlers, *Dribble*) and would henceforth be known as *Dribble & Spurt*. It'd feature all the shittiest characters from both comics, and after about six weeks someone would take this mutant hybrid that shouldn't live out behind the cowshed and put it out of its misery with a shovel. 'Great News For Readers Inside.' Those five words, along with 'Rover's living on a farm', were the brutal lie that was chiselled into the headstone of childhood happiness. It wasn't great news. Rover wasn't living on a farm, and neither were your nan and Elvis. Look, don't make this harder than it already is. You must have some idea where this editorial is going by now. Stop looking at me like that.

Yeah, this is the last issue of *Dodgem Logic*, at least for a while. I'm sure you'll be as astonished as I was that our initial strategy of paying contributors, high production values, no stinking capitalist advertising and an affordably low cover price (basically, 'Let's do everything backwards and see what happens') seems not to have worked. We've never quite broken even, despite the terrific response we've had to the mag where people had heard of it and could find it. So anyway, what we're planning is to make this the last issue of volume one, keep *Dodgem Logic* going with new material on the website for the immediate future, and in the meantime try to rethink the magazine in a viable form that can support itself. If that happens, we'll be back on the shelves later this year or early next year. If that doesn't happen, can I just say that this has been some of the best fun that I can remember having in my entire career? I'm incredibly grateful to all of our fantastic contributors and every member of our stylish and enlightened readership. Thanks for everything, and let's hope this works out, because with the stuff that's looming on the socio-political horizon I can imagine a time in the not-very-distant future when a wilfully random underground mag might be more necessary than ever.

As for this last issue, I think you'll agree that we're going out in a thermonuclear fireball of glory rather than with a whimper. We've got the hottest hipsters yet from Calluz, now that she's finally spraying them up on walls like she always wanted to, and we are honoured to present Dishy Dick Foreman's coming out of the closet with all those dresses that you thought you'd lost over his arm. There's the eye-watering bite of Mustard, my last disjointed communiqué from my spider-hole somewhere in Kingsley, and we're enormously proud to present the first chapter of Melinda Gebbie's forthcoming jaw-dropping autobiography. On a similar note we're equally honoured to include the titanic Michael Moorcock's jewel-like blitz reminiscences for the first time anywhere, and then we've got Calluz and her experience of being bailiff-bait, followed by the single most beautiful page of artwork that I've personally ever seen from Kevin O'Neill. Steve Aylett makes us laugh and then makes us think about what we've done, Barney Farmer and Lee Healey examine the perfectly reasonable fears of *Daily Mail* readers and the Alabama Three's Reverend D. W. Love goes in dry on Pier Paolo Pasolini. We've got the awesome Oscar Zarate's overheard wanderers in the night, Gary Mills conducting a Ghostwatch on our terminally haunted audio culture, thug-philosopher Simon Munnelly deliberately estranging our entire female readership because it's the last issue, and the spectacular conclusion of Savage Pencil and David Quantick's sublime *Louis Wain* (spoiler alert: it involves cats). Resilient right-wing hate figure Robin Ince warns us of the dangers of straying beyond the shared experience, Dave Hamilton reminds us that it *all* used to be organic food, and Margaret Killjoy suggests that we should get our shit together. Then we've got the scrumptious Wendi Jarrett, the furtively fertile Claire Ashby and the impish ingenuity of Tamsyn Payne before doctors Nerry and Feelgood turn up to do that thing where they shout 'Clear!' and then shake their heads. Finally, in our never-again Notes from Noho, Martin Marprelate entertains a doubtful guest, groovy Gary Ingham goes into Labour and Norman Adams runs screaming from the tree-line, wired with explosives.

So, other than a shout-out to Stewart, Josie, Illuzion, and all our other Dodgem Darlings, that's pretty much it. There now follows a shadowy intermission. Be in love, and be mysterious.

Alan Moore ~ Mull of Kintyre & Wrath of Khan

DODGEM LOGIC: THAT TOPPLED REGIME IN FULL

Alan Moore ~ Hated waxwork-faced dictator in ridiculous clothes. **Tony 'Knockabout' Bennett** ~ Co-dictator and butcher of hope. **Queen Calluz** ~ Editor & Imperial floozy with thousands of pairs of shoes.. **Joe 'The White Wolf' Brown** ~ Assistant editor and ruthless military strongman. **Gavin and Alix Wallace** ~ Design Gestapo starting new life in Argentina. **Claire Ashby** ~ Currently in a glass box in the Hague, probably growing cucumbers.

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Front cover - Main image: Tamara Rogers / Border: Joe Brown **Back Cover** - artwork by Oscar Zarate

Inside front cover - 'Great Hipsters in History' text by Alan Moore and artwork by Calluz



Pretty As You Feel

Dick Foreman slips on a rather fetching frock and takes a look at the phenomenon of males who 'cross-dress'.

1. Mystery

There are some mysteries that have intrigued and fascinated me all my life. This one's to do with the clothing we wear and the apparently fixed nature of signification it implies regarding our gender identities.

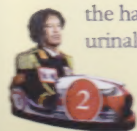
Obviously I'm talking here of the behaviour and expectations of the majority. We can all think of exceptions. David Bowie in his 'man's dress' on the original album sleeve of 'The Man Who Sold the World'; 'butch dykes' in plaid shirts & jeans; occasional fashions for frills and flowers on men's attire; Suzi Quatro in biker leathers... But these images are exceptions, they draw attention because they challenge the norm. The norm itself continues to endure, or at least to change slowly and imperceptibly across generations – as for example with the maxims applied to babies: 'pink for girls, blue for boys', the reverse having apparently been the case back at the turn of the last century.

In an issue of Oz from around 1972 there was an unaccredited two-page spread, a near photo-realistic, blue-tinted pencil or pastel drawing. It was a rear view of what appeared to be a young woman, wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat adorned with ribbon and roses, a short low-backed velvet dress over a pretty short-sleeved peasant blouse, seamed stockings and high heeled sandals. Charming, quintessentially feminine, 'she' stood facing a row of urinals, and from the position of the hands – unseen in front – and the proximity of one of the urinals appeared to be taking a pee, as would a man.

Oz magazine being the anarchic publication that it was, there was nothing to contextualise this image. The unknown artist had presumably submitted it, an editor had liked it and into the magazine it went. It was cleverly conceived. At the time, and even as I look at it again nearly 40 years later, I cannot be sure whether I am looking at a picture of a young woman who, perhaps playfully, has walked into a Gents and is pretending to be a man, or whether I am looking at a slenderly built 'she-male' who has decided not to use the Ladies. Both possibilities then lead to the question 'why?'

It was not the only image of androgyny to grace the pages of Oz. Warhol acolyte Candy Darling, for example, made a number of appearances. But this one captivated me. I don't know what the artist's intentions were but it suggested to me that there might come a time when the gender of this person just wouldn't matter. He or she was simply a human being who chose to dress thus and was completely free to do so and go where s/he pleased, without harassment or censure.

Dream on, Dick... That time never came. If 'she' had a penis, she could still be arrested, or get the shit beaten out of her by testosterone-fuelled, narrow-minded thugs. She'd still be seen by the majority as a weirdo, a sexual deviant, an uncomfortable threat to their orderly view of gender roles. If she didn't, well, let's say she'd need a lot of nerve to walk into a Gents, especially dressed like that...



At the start of her 2003 published book 'My Husband Betty', in which she explores aspects of life with her openly transvestite husband, writer Helen Boyd asks her readers to consider two televised scenarios. One is of a young woman reaching into a closet, pulling out and putting on a man's shirt, then lying sensually on a bed. Sexy, maybe, but perfectly acceptable. No challenge to anyone's preconceptions there. In the other, it's the same sequence but with a young man and it's an item of lacy lingerie. Few, she suggests, would find this sexy. Uneasy laughter would probably be provoked, the assumption would be made that he was gay and/or some kind of kinkster.

Her thoughtful and highly recommended book then seeks answers to the questions raised by this thought experiment and to examine not only the pleasures and difficulties raised by her relationship with 'Betty', but also to look at the wider community of cross-dressing males and their partners.

It is one of her conclusions that the taboo against male cross-dressers is partially maintained by their own wish to remain secretive. They cling to an outwardly masculine identity because of the privileges that apparently come with it. When they complain to her that they lack the freedom that she – as a modern Western woman – has to wear in public pretty much what she chooses to wear, she retorts: "You haven't earned it." And she points back to times when there were absolute restrictions on what was deemed acceptable for women to wear, and the struggles of the suffragettes and later the women's movement to overcome the mindset that dictated those restrictions. Women, she says, have earned the right to wear pants.

So it's the assumption that being male confers privilege that needs to be undermined and to this end she suggests it's time for cross-dressing men to open up and stand up for their freedom, just as have the women's movement and the gay community. Of course, the fight's not over in either of those cases, but the advances are more than clear.

So, cards on the table... I'm not kidding about the 'fetching frock' in my by-line. There are several in my wardrobe (well, frocks anyway – you might not think them fetching). And if you're interested enough to read on, I want to take a look myself over the next few pages at how attitudes may just be slowly and subtly starting to change. I'd like to examine some of my own interests and experiences, in the context of male cross-dressing's history, ramifications and development. And I'd like to blend it all in to what I see as a kind of collective philosophy that is beginning to emerge from the pages of *Dodgem Logic*.

But first, let me just check that my seams are straight...

2. Imagery

Perhaps because it remains an area shrouded by mainstream embarrassment and discomfort, there are a number of misconceptions regarding male cross-dressing. Before we go further, it's probably worth addressing some of these.

In using any form of categorisation, we risk losing track of individuality. In fact, we are looking at a wide spectrum of behaviours ranging from, say, a guy who gets a sexual kick from an occasional touch of 'role reversal', through to the man who feels with utter conviction that he is a woman born, unfortunately, in the body of a man. The latter end of the spectrum is known as transexualism and, of course, it runs both ways. Personally, I've nothing but respect for men and women who are genuinely prepared to go through the arduous, demanding process of 'transitioning', mentally and physically, from one gender to another. They are driven by a depth of conviction that is not to be argued with or undermined, but goes well beyond what I want or feel able to explore here.

Clearly though, it's a misconception to say that a man who finds himself elsewhere in the spectrum has an intrinsic desire to change his sex. For most of us (as I'll explore later) it's a question of how we perceive ourselves as men. A sex change is simply not necessary. Another misconceived idea that we need to shoot down in flames is that it has anything whatsoever to do with sexual orientation. It doesn't. Cross-dressers can be straight, gay, bi or asexual. End of story.

One more misconception might be to attach any fixed image to the cross-dresser. Just as there are myriad ways in which women project their own concepts of femininity, from Barbara Cartland to Vi Subversa, so it is with us chaps who like to dip into the dressing-up box and pull out the girlier items. In 'My Husband Betty', Helen Boyd attempts a list of categories. She too recognises that there are as many types as there are individuals, and that most individuals will tend to recognise themselves as a blend of more than one type. But for those unfamiliar with the territory, the list is an indication of the range we're dealing with.

She begins with **drag queens**, whose projection is pretty much that of the burlesque – glamour and glitter, layered elaborately. Whilst not all drag queens are necessarily gay, the style is intimately associated with the art of camp, as epitomised by the Albin Mougeotte character in 'La Cage aux Folles', or almost anyone apart from Brad and Janet in 'The Rocky Horror Show'. It's the larger than life, showbiz end of cross-dressing. Perhaps it's ultimate extreme was explored by that incredible character Divine in the 1970s films of John Waters. White trash camp... Whoah! Now there's a heady mix.

Her next is the **fetishist**, for whom there is a fixation on one particular item (or, one hopes, a small range for those who get bored easily). The classic is probably the high-heeled shoe fetishist. We're close to the edge here, I think, as far as calling it a form of cross-dressing is concerned.

She lists the **closeted cross-dresser** and the **out cross-dresser** as a pair of types, the former keeping it all under wraps, the latter living it openly for all to see and probably blending with the **transgenderist**. This category she describes as having deeper feelings, wanting to express his 'inner woman' and quite likely at least contemplating a sex change. In contrast there's the **classic transvestite** who "knows he dresses for sexual pleasure and enjoys the sensual side of cross-dressing more than anything else."

Next, she carves out a notch for what she calls the **slutty cross-dresser**, "a horny guy in a dress". We're in the realms of the crass here. Do a web search on transvestites and it won't be long before you hit on some of these guys posing pornographically in hitched up leather mini skirts, stocking tops showing, and promising a deluge of sleaze in exchange for a credit card number.

Her final distinct type is the **submissive** or **sissy cross-dresser**, for whom the fantasy of enforced feminisation is paramount. These guys crave servitude, bondage, French Maids' outfits and fishnets. (But, hey, ladies – if you hate doing the housework...)*

The imagery that surrounds these latter categories particularly is likely to make any respectable feminist cringe. We're looking at an identification with what male-dominated culture has forced on women to ensure they remain second class citizens: uniforms that denigrate.

We're into some interesting loops here. Think of the clientele of 70s 'madam' Cynthia Payne. Judges, high ranking policemen, civic dignitaries et al, handing over wads to Madam Cyn to be dressed as maids and schoolgirls, humiliated and spanked (and to wrap it all up with a nice cup of tea and a plate of



scrambled eggs afterwards... how very, very English!) Why? If they want to relax these guys could play a round of golf, shoot critters or sail yachts. It's a question the shrinks have largely failed to answer. Nature or nurture? What drives seemingly powerful men to crave such seeming powerlessness?

Hang on a minute, though... So far, we've only been looking at WEIRD folk. That's: western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic. A minority: just one in eight of the people on this planet. And while we're at it, we've just bitten off one small chunk of the human timeline. There's a wider perspective to be looked at here. Much, much wider...

(* If any of you are wondering which of Ms Boyd's categories I fall into, by the way, let me see, now... A penchant for beautifully embroidered Afghani dresses, fashionably imported in the 1970s. Check. Role model: Alice in Wonderland. Check. Won't shave legs because, hey, man, it's just too much hassle. Check. Hmmm... Looks like I'm an ageing hippie cross-dresser.)

3. History

The chances are slim to none that archaeologists will ever give us a definitive insight into pre-historic cross-dressing, but my guess is that it will go back to the time when any distinction whatsoever emerged between the clothing worn by men and that worn by women. In mythology and legend, it crops up frequently – usually in a story giving some imperative reason why the man, woman, god or goddess has to cross dress. It's most frequently a form of disguise. Norse god Thor dressing up in bridal wear in a ruse to regain his stolen hammer. The heroines of numerous ballads putting on 'man's attire' in order to enlist in army or navy, like 'Jack-a-Roe' whose intent was to seek out a lost lover. Now and again we get a variant on this motif, like the enforced feminisation of Hercules, in Greek mythology, when as a punishment he is given as a slave to Omphale.

On the surface, it doesn't look like these stories tell us much about the urge to cross-dress. After all, a bit of gender switching can make for a great storyline, as Shakespeare well knew. But just why are these tales so entertaining? Are they perhaps satisfying a human need to acknowledge that the very distinction between male and female is not as clear cut as generally meets the eye?

It's a recognition, but an uneasy one. Throughout the cultures of the world there exist, in one form or another, a minority of 'third sex' entities such as the Kathoey or 'lady-boys' of Thailand, or the Hijra of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. They tend to be men living and dressing as women and their sexual relationships, if any, tend to be with men. On the one hand, they have a degree of social acceptance, legal status even; on the other, one can't help but get the picture that they end up being treated as second class citizens, or worse.

There are some interesting exceptions, over which I'd like to linger a little longer. The Fa'afafine of Samoa are biological males with a strong feminine gender orientation. This is apparently recognised by parents while children are still small, and with that recognition they are raised as Fa'afafines. Though the term itself means 'in the manner of woman', their gender role is distinct from that of men or women, and they are free to take as partners men, women or even other Fa'afafines. They are known for their capacity for hard work and their dedication to the Samoan form of the family. On the face of it, this seems to be an extraordinarily enlightened cultural response.

A more widespread example of a similar practice is to be found amongst most of the Native American tribes of the USA and Canada. Although they have as many names as there are

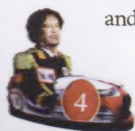


(Bottom Left : Grayson Perry as Claire. Bottom Right: Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy)

tribes and languages, the modern term 'Two-Spirit' is applied across the board to those Native Americans whose body is thought to house both a masculine and a feminine spirit. That said, the concept varies from tribe to tribe. It can encompass individuals who are biologically male or female, and can be seen as a mixing of genders, or as an intermediate gender or even as a distinct gender in itself. It can involve either cross-dressing or – logically enough – the mixing of traditionally male and traditionally female clothing.

Again there are differences from tribe to tribe, but, on the whole, two-spirited people are considered free to partner with either males or females. It would appear that it was the European settlers, in their spread across North America, who brought the concept of 'homosexuality' with them, along with a derogatory attitude particularly towards those two-spirits who were males living and dressing as females. Consequently, Native Americans were culturally infected with a sense of shame regarding the two-spirits; although in recent years their gay and lesbian activists have worked hard to restore the concept's validity.

Okay, I'm boiling down a lot of history, but crucially here was a continent full of societies in which gender was considered independently of bodily form. Indeed some tribes apparently even held back from initially defining a child's gender, observing its inclinations and allowing a decision to be made on the basis of these at puberty. Moreover, two-spirits were accepted in their societies. They had, in some tribes, specific roles of a magical, medicinal or other nature. They were valued.



It seems an open-minded and healthy approach from my perspective, though my specs come with projectors and I'm often prone as the next guy to seeing what I want to see.

Whatever, these sub-groups I've identified are far from the only manifestation of the cross-dressing urge in world history. There are recurrent tales of individuals who, for one reason or another, chose to appear as one of the 'opposite' sex. The balance often appears to be in favour of strong and courageous women, who would not, without the deception, have been considered capable of whatever they sought to achieve.

Another manifestation occurs in the form of certain festivals when the switching of male and female clothing was a part of the proceedings. It is said, for example, that in the ancient Roman festival of 'Saturnalia' (celebrating the turn of the year) not only did slaves dress in the clothing of their masters and vice versa, but that men dressed as women. Similarly, the Kalash people of the Hindu Kush Mountains in Pakistan have a winter solstice festival known as Chaumos, in honour of the god known as Balimain. Balimain, it seems, is a deity with both male and female attributes, and thus cross-dressing on the part of both men and women is a major part of the proceedings.

The concept of a deity who is both male and female takes us back to myth and legend where this section began, and will be briefly returned to later. But first, let's step back into our own time and culture for a look at where contemporary Western attitudes to male cross-dressing just may be going...

4. Trajectory

Where indeed? A case could be made that little has changed. Even some of the other advances mentioned, like those made by gay men and lesbians, can be seen as fragile – as Debbie Delano made clear in *Dodgem Logic 4*. But this is not a world of certainties, and a fragile advance is still better than a retreat. Consolidation becomes, at least, more of a possibility.

Let's take a look at the entertainment media, as an indication – for what it's worth – of how our collective consciousness may be developing. We've seen how, whatever the taboos that may surround it, a bit of cross-dressing can be an engaging story element. From the ballads and legends I've mentioned, through Shakespeare to 'Some Like It Hot', it crops up with regularity. And as the archetypal pantomime dame typifies, a bloke in an elaborate frock would appear to have something intrinsically funny about him. So, any change here?

Perhaps. Draw a line in UK comedy from Dick Emery dames, fluttering and pouting catch phrases ("Ooh, you are awful!") to Emily Howard in 'Little Britain' and it's clear that the audience is enjoying a greater level of sophistication. It's Emily's incompetence in being a 'lady' that's the nub of the joke, along with 'her' increasingly desperate desire to maintain the illusion. At its best, it's character humour – the dressing-up is just a part of the joke. Interestingly, in interviews, David Walliams and Matt Lucas have expressed an enjoyment for getting into frocks, though whether this is just a bit of transgressive self-promotional spin it's hard to tell.

A more unequivocally expressed inclination to cross-dress comes from stand-up comedian and actor Eddie Izzard, who 'came out' as a heterosexual transvestite not long after his career began to take off. Statements regarding transvestism crop up in his ad-lib monologues and are as patently and delightfully absurd as his comments on any other topic. I'm particularly fond of the way he defines himself as an "executive transvestite", which he distinguishes from "weirdo transvestites" such as one time FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover.

Izzard's major contribution, and one that I think has made an impact at least upon those who are drawn to his work, is to establish that his cross-dressing is no big deal. It's important to him, but it's just a part of who he is. He'll speak in interviews of being in a "blokey phase", or "sometimes I feel in a girlie mood." Down to earth statements like these take the stigma right out of the subject matter.

Another individual who has made some impact is the ceramic artist Grayson Perry, who chose to accept a Turner Prize for his work in 2003 dressed as his alter-ego, 'Claire'.

Perry is not the first male artist to have developed a feminine counterpart. In researching this article, I came across information concerning 'Rose Sélavy', a pseudonym for the surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp. The name, punning in French for the phrase "eros, that's life", was used by Duchamp as a signature for some of his readymade sculptures, but he seems to have developed Rose initially as an alternative identity. Dressed elegantly and made up as Rose he posed for a number of photos by Man Ray in the 1920s.

Arguably, Duchamp's appearances as Rose were more of an artistic act than the result of any compulsive desire to cross-dress. By his own admission, this was not the case with Grayson Perry who has frankly and openly identified himself as a transvestite, and recounted his experiences in the biography: 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl'.

The book covers the territory of his early life and interests across the board – a dysfunctional family background, youthful rebellion, artistic development etc. – and his transvestism comes over as just one aspect of a complex and fascinating identity. As many, perhaps all cross-dressers are, he was drawn to the activity as a small child. He recalls playing an angel in a school nativity play. "One morning I saw all the costumes hanging up on a line in the school hall awaiting the start of a performance and I got a little feeling I still get now when I look inside a woman's wardrobe or think about women's clothes, a little flutter of excitement with fear around it."

He goes on to describe his early experiments with dressing up; a certain – perhaps exhibitionist – side of his personality pushing him to appear 'dressed' in public places, with the fear of discovery enhancing the thrill. He is perceptively analytical, and later in the book he speaks with insight about his encounters with the Beaumont Society, the primary national support group for cross-dressers in the UK.

A confident and fluent speaker, Perry has subsequently made himself something of a media figure, contributing articles to various publications, appearing on chat shows. Thus, like Eddie Izzard, he has raised the profile and gained, I think, an unprecedented degree of acceptance – at least amongst those who are aware of his existence.

So the trend I'm identifying, tentative as it is, seems to be towards greater acceptance and increasing subtlety in the public perception of cross-dressing. Izzard and Perry are Brits, and I'm not aware of anyone making the same impact in the USA or elsewhere, except in rock/pop music, where cross-dressers pop out of the woodwork with some regularity. Again, there is arguably a line towards greater subtlety in presentation and perception. I could point to OTT raunchy transsexual singer Jayne County back in the 70s and contrast her with cerebral ambient artist Terre Thaemlitz in more recent times. But to the average punter, it's probably the appearances in dresses of Manic Street Preachers' Nicky Wire, deceased Nirvana singer Kurt Cobain or Gordon Sharp of Cindytalk that have made more impact. Again, no one making such a big deal any more, it's just: "Accept it. Move on."

Skinheads in fishnets. Businessmen in blouses. Is there really a reason why all of us couldn't take this in our stride?





5. Tapestry

Having selectively trawled through world history and media studies, I'll ask you to bear with me now as I try to weave myself into this picture. And see if I can't provide an answer or two to these questions I keep asking...

Now, when I say 'myself', I'm bearing in mind the suggestion by neurological scientists that the sense of self, the core of being that is 'I', may well be illusory. As one philosopher (Derek Parfit) has put it: "A human life consists of a long series of enmeshed mental states rolling like tumbleweed down the days and years, but with no one (no thing) at the centre." So what makes me a cross-dresser is not fixed, it's just some stuff that has become tangled in the tumbleweed. There could well be a genetic element to it – a certain predisposition – but nothing that, say, a serious brain injury couldn't erase. With this thought in the background, let's dip into some experiences that are associated with that stuff.

- Possibly one of my earliest recollections, before the age of 9, child's play dressing-up – putting on a dress, or maybe it was a night-dress or a slip and finding it comfortable, soft and pleasant to wear.
- Realising as I sought to repeat this experience that it was frowned upon and that it was safer, somehow, to keep it a secret.
- Fascination and delight in 'feminine' fabrics, the cut of a neckline, the swirl of a hem; coupled with perplexity – why do these garments somehow only seem 'natural' worn by a female and not a male?
- The desire persisting into and beyond adolescence, leading to deep sexual insecurity – the feeling of being a 'pervert'.

So far, so standard. The majority of cross-dressing men will have similar recollections. Furtiveness and shame, fear of ridicule or being shunned are commonly reported. Why are these feelings so closely associated? If the tendency was seen in families as unremarkable, on a par with an interest in, say, football, what difference would this make to the quality of a cross-dresser's life in adulthood? (Oops! More questions!)



In my adolescence came the late 60s. Rugs were being yanked out from under people's feet, apple carts tipped, perspectives changed... 'Unisex' clothing, for example, became for a while a fashionable concept. Contemporary fashions plundered styles from across the world, and it became more acceptable (in hippie circles at least) to see guys wearing robes, jellabiya, sarongs... These flowing garments may have gratified the 'feminine side' of some hippie men – though wearing them did not necessarily eliminate macho attitudes and sexism. But me, I wanted ribbons and bows, lace and frills. I wanted 'girlie'...

And then it was 1972. And there was that picture in the *Oz* magazine, that archetypal feminine figure apparently making use of a man's urinal. As I considered why it was both seemingly unacceptable and deeply attractive for me to dress as s/he did, and as I contemplated a future in which I might feel free to do so, the core of my present approach began to form.

But there was still a great deal to consider. By this time, feminism was making an impact and – short of the extremities of Valerie Solanas and SCUM – it made a lot of sense to me. I did my best to unlearn a whole bunch of shitty attitudes in which I'd been indoctrinated over the years. As far as my urge to cross-dress was concerned, however, there was a glitch. At that time, for at least the majority of the feminist women who I respected and admired, girlie clothing was a no-no. And if you were a bloke and you wanted to wear that stuff, weren't you just promulgating an attitude to women that characterised them as submissive, flighty and inferior?

Of course, that all depended on your view of what that clothing implied about its wearer. In fact, clothes is clothes. You put on a boiler suit if you want to fix your car, so what's wrong with putting on lingerie when you want some sensual pleasure? The bottom line is, if you do it as a matter of personal choice – and not because you've been coerced or indoctrinated – then no one has the right to say you're wrong. I regret that I wasn't sufficiently clear regarding such things then, but I was still figuring it out – too unconfident to discuss it openly.

It wasn't 'til I was well into my thirties that I realised I was an executive and not a weirdo, and that all this secrecy wasn't doing me a lot of good. Opened up to a few good friends. Stopped short, I hope, of becoming a cross-dressing bore. Meanwhile, I think, a lot of feminists loosened up in their attitudes towards clothing. It became something to have fun with, to subvert expectations by combining, say, delicate floral skirts or dresses with beefy Doc Martin boots – a charming look to my eyes.

We're back to changing attitudes now, and having mentioned the years in which I struggled with all this, it seems appropriate to mention at this point the Internet. Before the Web, lack of information was a big part of the problem. Grayson Perry describes how he used to go to libraries and look up anything he could about transvestites – more likely than not discovering material that treated it as an aberrant condition. If you'd heard of the Beaumont Society you could write to them, and there were a few other scattered resources but it was often the case that you'd think you were on your own. Not any more. Of course there's a lot of misleading crap on the Internet, but search engines will get you whatever you need to know if you sift and persist.

So where am I at now, as the years have rolled on and I find myself on the verge of senior citizenship? Some things have changed, as we've seen. Lots haven't. Me, I'm not so mystified. I'm on good terms with the contents of my dressing-up box. Let's conclude with a look at those terms.

6. Finery

To the world at large, I present myself as a man. That's the body I was born in so it gives me a convenient and comfortable persona in which to conduct my day-to-day affairs. In fact, I spend the bulk of my time engaged in activities to which the way I'm clothed bears no relevance whatsoever. For me, then, the urge to cross-dress occupies a small but important space. It's for leisure and enjoyment. A hobby, if you will...

When I go there, I'm not trying to impersonate a woman. I'm no actor and the subtlety of it is beyond me. It occurred to me, at some point, that the qualities 'masculine' and 'feminine' do not have to accord with being male or female and can be blended according to the tastes of the individual. As suggested last page, identity is not a fixed thing. It's a process. Modification continues from birth to death. So it's possible to choose the aspects of masculinity and femininity that suit or enhance one's experience, and to disregard the rest.

Like the 'classic transvestite' I dress for sensual and at times sexual pleasure, enjoying a variety of sensations that traditional male clothing doesn't provide. A private person by nature, I don't feel any need to do this in public. The stuff that appeals to the other 'types', as Helen Boyd lists them, sometimes appeals to me. But if I spend very long contemplating those more stereotyped aspects of femininity, it begins to feel like I'm looking for a nice, ripe peach and being presented instead with a box of sweet, sticky chocolates.

So, unless you share my proclivities, why should any of this matter to you? Thanks to the self-serving and short-sighted activities of our species, our world appears to be heading for hell in a handbasket. Civilisation, as Ms Killjoy so trenchantly points out in this publication, has proved an unsustainable concept. If there's to be any hope for future generations of human beings to be able to enjoy this world, we need to move on, right now. Yet we hesitate, reluctant to shrug off the comfort of old ways, even as we teeter on the brink of uncontrollable climate change, the collapse of biodiversity and

all that may follow. We're like the guys in the coach at the end of 'The Italian Job', about to go over the cliff, yet the majority of us don't appear to realise that there's anything wrong.

In this stark context, the cross-dressing issue doesn't seem to matter much at all. But...

It has also been said on these pages that we live in two realities. One is the material world, largely measurable by science. The other is that of consciousness, of mental phenomena – through which we can experience the material world but yet so much more besides. As Alan Moore cogently argued a few issues back, it is here we find meaning and significance. It is here too where we may look beyond our selves and identify the disastrous side effects of our sense of self-importance.

It would be easy at this point to suggest a sort of magical significance for the act of cross-dressing. I could weave together the uniting of masculine and feminine principles that is said to be a goal of alchemy with the significance of dual-natured deities – such as Balmain, as we've seen, also the Hindus' Shiva and doubtless more – and perhaps tie it all in with the 'two souls' concept. Do it with enough conviction and I could probably start a cult. Neo-shamanic cross-dressers in power frocks...

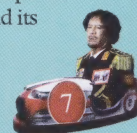
Let's not go there. Instead, let's look more deeply into this reality of consciousness, of thoughts and ideas, for different and more expansive ways to seek out and find who we are. Gender stereotyping, when taken too seriously, is part and parcel of a mindset that is locked into our civilisation. In immaterial reality we can, like the Samoans and the native Americans, be more flexible, more protean in our approach. It would be good for men, on the whole, to consider being more gentle, considerate, tactile and loving. Ultimately, these qualities bear no relationship to gender, but as ideas they are associated with the feminine. You don't have to be a cross-dresser to take them on board, but recognition that there is a realm where no role need be fixed can be nothing but helpful.

In this realm, we are not confined by the limitations of our physical reality. Like Second Lifers freed from the need for cyber-technology, we are able to shape and build that flexible stuff of our 'selves' as beautifully, richly and strangely as our imaginations permit. We are not making 'avatars', we are making vessels for our consciousness to inhabit. Back in the material world we can connect with our immaterial selves through ritual, meditation, sensual enhancement, sensory deprivation... We can choose from a vast range of techniques developed over millennia.

So here, gender identity is entirely fluid and flexible. Stereotypes need no longer confine us, but instead become our playthings. They probably wouldn't put it this way, but maybe that's what Madame Cyn's clientele were looking for: to become in the safety of her suburban bedrooms their own opposites, and to find some sort of balance in the process.

Whatever, I see my and others' cross-dressing as a manifestation of our immaterial selves, something to be explored, to be enjoyed and in which to take pride. It is ritual and celebration, it is restorative and conducive to mental health. And in accepting and enjoying my self, I become more able to accept and enjoy yours (that's assuming you're not a psychotic serial killer or the leader of a mainstream political party, of course).

And if, in the context of our global dilemma, that sounds like fiddling while Rome burns then I ask you to consider this. I'm trying to pick out a tune that will inspire us to fight the flames. It's only, I suggest, when we're on better terms with our selves that we can hope to overcome the inertia that stops us from acting in the interests of our species, our planet and its future.





FREE INSIDE

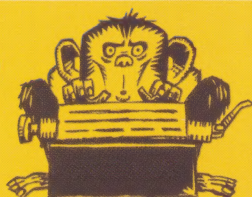
PLEASURES OF THE FLUSH

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NORTHAMPTON EDITION



Ceci n'est pas une pipe plomb.

Detectives investigate series of bizarre deaths

Populace on alert following succession of baffling homicides



Quincy Savage
Scotland Yard

A man was found dead this morning in macabre circumstances, sprawled over his kitchen counter with a large red papier-mâché lobster up his bottom.

This is the latest in a series of freakish and baffling deaths that have occurred recently.

Earlier this month an unfortunate young couple were chased off Brighton pier by a herd of tap-dancing giraffes. Two weeks before that, a group of businessmen were savagely attacked by burning lampposts.

And in January, a woman was

found asphyxiated by a clock that seemed to have been somehow melted over her face.

"We can no longer ignore the trombone-headed elephant in the room," said Scotland Yard's DCI Morris. "This is clearly the work of a surreal killer."

Detectives have traced the string of killings back to a case in Paris last year, where the murder weapon was found with a note saying "Ceci n'est pas une pipe plomb" ("This is not a lead pipe").

'We can no longer ignore the trombone-headed elephant in the room.'

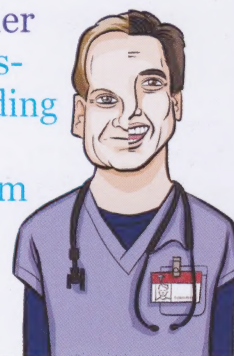
Asked if these killings may be connected to the shower of dead fairies found scattered across a busy road last week, Detective Morris dismissed this as unrelated, saying: "To be honest, that's more magical realism."

It seems that the killer may have contacted the police to brag about his crimes. Although instead of a letter, he sent a giant perspex eye crying tears of Spam, so that wasn't really much help.

Police said they are looking for a man in his mid-30s, possibly hovering off the ground and hurling cats backwards through the air.

"Also," said DCI Morris. "He may have an apple for a head." ■

Everybody
Scrubs
Frasier
Cross-
breeding
the
sitcom
TV



Each passing thought
saved for posterity
typed from the loo
Haiku tweets

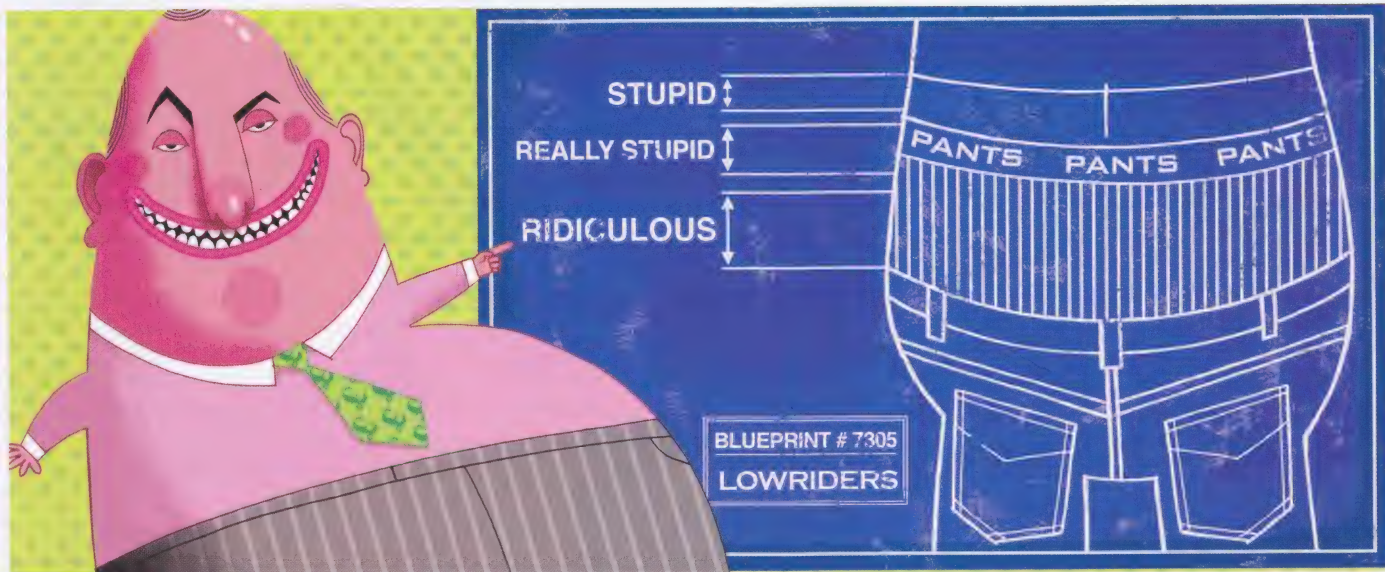
Media



Did you know:
'San Miguel' is
Spanish for
'same
again'
Travel



Style



Fashion cabal's dark secret

Middle-aged billionaires compete to make teenagers look stupid



Emily Veganburger
Shoreditch

An undercover investigation by the *Daily Mustard* has revealed that all fashion trends are dictated by an elite group of super-rich, middle-aged businessmen. The shadowy cabal meets regularly in a warehouse conversion off Brick Lane to hatch their plans for international style domination.

Although the existence of this fashion mafia had long been suspected, the true purpose of their conspiracy has sent shockwaves through the industry.

Secret recordings show that these wheezing 50-somethings, jealous of the hip, sexy younger generation, wreak their revenge by coming up with increasingly ridiculous-looking fashions, then engage their massive marketing

'They wreak their revenge by creating increasingly ridiculous fashions.'

juggernauts to convince naïve teens that they look cool.

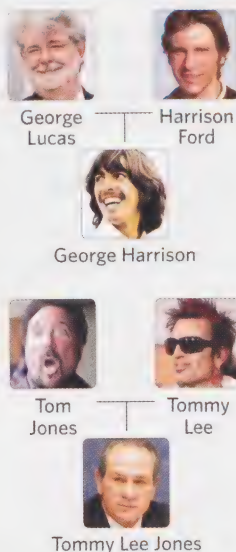
Trendy young things then spend thousands swaddling themselves in the latest overpriced designer threads, believing themselves to be rebelling against out-of-touch

old farts when they are actually victims of the older generation's elaborate practical joke.

Indeed, members of the cabal would compete to see how stupid they can make their kids look. For example, the prevalent 'trousers hanging below the arse' style continues to be popular in the key GT (gullible twat) demographic, despite hundreds of trip-related fatalities every year.



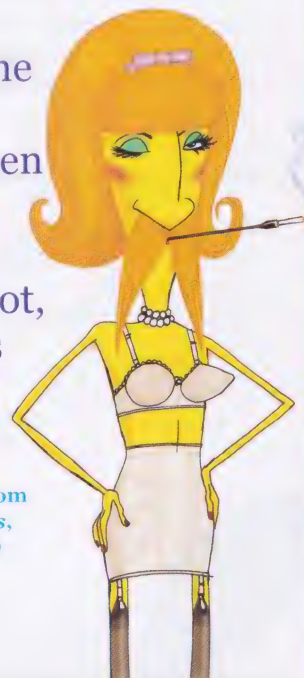
FAMILY TREES



Back in the days when men were men and women were, more often than not, young chaps in drag.

Continuing our exclusive excerpts from *Derring Dos & Don'ts*, the memoirs of Col D John Coleman

Weekend magazine



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Dodgem Days

by Alan Moore

*Unable to master even the most rudimentary modern technology but still eager to impress the trivial details of his life on other people, master innovator **Alan Moore** comes up with a new form of blog that avoids the internet altogether and is published in the pages of a magazine, or 'mag'. He therefore suggests that this new 21st century mode of communication is referred to as a glog.*

I think the last time that I spoke to you would have been from the Nuremberg Rally podium of issue #7's editorial, banged out at the last minute in the first week of December. There's been a lot happening since then, not all of it solely inside my mind. We got the mags back from the printer on the right day, but a few hours later than we'd been anticipating. I can usually arrange to turn up after all the heavy lifting's done, pick up a bale of complimentary copies, then buy everyone a bun and fuck off home. I know that doesn't sound as caring or committed as my cultivated liberal image would suggest, but look at Rupert Murdoch. When was the last time that he bought everyone a bun?

So anyway, by a disastrous miscalculation I turned up down at the Dodgem bunker shortly after our six thousand copies had arrived, their wooden

pallets stacked upon the pavement of St. Michael's Road, just as the snowstorm started. There was The Artist Who's Apparently Too Good to Be Known as Downtown Joe Brown Anymore, dressed as some sort of novelty lumberjack from a Kinder Egg, and Queen Calluz in a skirt designed to capture the attention of whichever eligible morgue attendant got the job of handling her hypothermic corpse. Despite the fact that I prefer to think of them as comic relief hired-goon henchmen like Ned Beatty and that woman in the first *Superman* film, these people are my friends. I couldn't just stand by and let them do all of the work, or at least not out in the street with people passing by where it might look bad, so I moved a pack or two of magazines inside and then pretended that I'd had a stroke so I could go for a sit down.

The thirty or so seconds when we'd all been mucking in together in defiance of the swirling blizzard were a tremendous bonding experience and team building exercise, which led me to think of all the other happy moments that we'd shared in these agreeable Dickensian surroundings. I remembered the occasion when I'd popped out onto the front step for a discreet jazz cigarette while Calluz joined me for one of her skinny roll-ups and Joe sat alone inside in the depressing shadows doing all the work and secretly enjoying all the put-upon resentment as good ammunition for his uncontrollable paranoia and passive aggression. When we went back in, he glared at us accusingly. 'I bet that if there was a raid, it'd be me that got arrested'. This was more perceptive than I'd expected, and I explained to him that me and Calluz had already

Good



privately agreed that in such an eventuality, it would indeed be Joe who took the fall. 'I mean, look at this lovely young woman in the bloom of her youth and think about what prison would do to her. As for me, I'm an old man. I'd die inside and never see daylight again.' Joe, rather selfishly we thought, began to weep. 'But I'm the pretty one. I'd get bummed.' Calluz used her gentle, caring voice...the one she uses to calm hyperactive children or aggressive bailiffs...and tried to accentuate the many positives there are in getting bummed. 'Well, you never know. You might like it. After all, it's an erogenous zone.' He gazed up at her through his tears with an uncomprehending, anguished look and said 'What, *prison*?' Good times.

Just a few days after issue #7 had turned up I strolled down to the snowbound Boroughs to help with the distribution of our Christmas hampers. Calluz was already there, along with darling little Chelsea from the block, who I remember Calluz minding in the CASPAR offices at St. Luke's House, the former residence of *Dodgem Logic*'s own stealth-bomber, Norman Adams. Martin Marprelate had showed up to provide assistance, which is a tremendous gesture when you take into account that he's at least four hundred years old. I mean, basically, there's nothing left of him but a gnawed femur and a paper bag with a few teeth in, but, God bless him, he was out there dragging himself rattling through the permafrost like a professional. Claire Ashby, our guerrilla goddess, turned up with her wheelbarrow and an account of being cautioned by a constable for spreading grit across the ice between the door of a disabled neighbour and the nearby local shops and phone-box. Grit is only meant for roads, apparently. What if a Ford Mondeo has a nasty fall and needs a hip replacement? It was a terrific turn-out. While the evil flying-monkeys that I'd hoped for didn't show up, we had something equally unlikely

in the form of an honest, decent, working-class independent councillor with an Intercity Firm tattoo, the splendid Tony Clarke. Richard, the manager of the Co-op on Barry Road who'd helped provide the hampers nobly turned up to assist the hand-out, and even *Dodgem Logic*'s increasingly despairing accountant John Henderson of Dove Naish arrived to put his immaculately-clad shoulder to the wheel. Along with various valiant Clarke and Marprelate offspring, off we set with a song in our hearts and all our Good King Wenceslas shit over our shoulders.

One thing that became embarrassingly obvious is that when it comes to negotiating Boroughs streets that weren't there forty years ago, I clearly haven't got a fucking clue. We wandered around in the icebound lanes looking for blocks of flats named after saints, shouting to each other for directions and sounding like a crashed coach-load of Catholic tourists just turned up in Heaven and hoping to meet all the celebrities. 'Where's St. Barnabas?' 'Is that one over there St. Stephen's?' We slithered on the icy upper landings and I quickly figured out that my shape through the frosted glass was not best suited to make vulnerable tenants answer their front doors. Still, in the end we made sure everyone got a delivery. On a second outing, me and Claire popped in to visit Dougie from the photo-shoot in issue #5. He's looking good and sends you all his best. Our next stop was the pretty agoraphobic woman who's currently occupying Claire's old flat in Bath Street, more or less exactly on the former site of the Destructor, the incinerator-chimney eulogised in *Dodgem Logic* issues #1 and #2. She isn't comfortable with answering the door, so Claire gave an elaborate secret knock at the side-window and the woman's nine or ten year-old son leaned out to accept the groceries and told us about the new bike that he was going to get at Christmas. Later, I'd been asked

to make a personal delivery to Olive and Ron Ost, downin Pike Lane. The parents of my Spring Lane schoolmate Robert Ost, they've lived in the same house for more than fifty years. When I was twelve or so, I'd plunged into the River Nene down at Foot Meadow after a disastrous attempt to walk on water, just to make sure that it wasn't something relatively easy and that Jesus hadn't been making too much of a big deal about it. This is actually true, incidentally. Except that I wasn't twelve. I was forty-three. Anyway, Olive and Ron had allowed me to change from my sodden and typhoid-infected clothing into a comically small outfit belonging to their son in their kitchen on that fateful night, and a man doesn't forget a debt like that easily. On the way down to see them, I observed that some passing freestyle social satirist had changed the street-sign with a magic marker so that it read 'Pikey Lane'. Yeah. Yeah, I see what they did there. It's no big deal, but it strikes me as unfair that there aren't any places in Northampton called 'Middleclasstwa Crescent', for example, just to level up the playing field.

With hampers all delivered, I call Michael Moorcock over there in Texas to apologise for our Miss Truckleton referring to him as a threatening tramp in her unfortunate letter-column debut. I offer to fire her, but Moorcock's a bigger man than that and self-effacingly says he gets called that all the time. Seriously though, Mike, just say the word and the bitch is gone. I mean it. Call me. After that, me and the beautiful Melinda swan off down to London to attend a couple of the remarkable Robin Ince's seasonal attempts to strangle the baby Jesus in his manger, the Gifted Children evenings that he wrangles at the Bloomsbury Theatre. Joe Brown had arranged a *Dodgem Logic* video display there in the lobby, flogging

time



issues to the clientele along with his pert spouse and handler, *Dodgem Logic*'s meta-seamstress Tamsyn 'No Gain Without' Payne. Robin's Bloomsbury gigs are always a delight. You get the best comedians and performers, not to mention the most lively scientific minds, in Britain. And me. Anyway, we had a great time. Josie Long (Or 'J-Money' as I briefly experimented with calling her) was there on the first night and invited us to her Christmas party after hours on the night after. She told us about all the canapés she'd prepared, and we said we'd definitely be there, and then we betrayed her because it was cold, our hotel was only up the road from the theatre and besides, we're frightened of Hackney. *Bad Science*'s Ben Goldacre was in the house, along with the heroic Simon Singh, fresh from his legal victory over the chiropractors trying to sue him for suggesting that there's something wrong with chiropractors claiming they can treat life-threatening ailments which they demonstrably can't. Ben gets a lot of the same flak from the same kind of people, and I can't help wondering why alternative therapists prefer to settle things in court. It doesn't really seem very alternative. Couldn't they send Simon and Ben some, I dunno, negative Raiki energy instead? That would really wipe those smug smiles off of their intelligent, educated faces and stop them thinking of such people as at best halfwits and at worst actually evil beings, wouldn't it? I mean, I'm just a relatively competent witchdoctor, but that's certainly how I always handle business like that. If I thought that when Richard Dawkins railed against delusional charlatans manipulating the weak-minded for their own benefit he was talking *specifically* about me, I'd be straight on to Bartzabel the Homicidal Planetary Spirit of Mars and fuck the consequences. Come on, chiropractors. Man up.

On the comedy front, aside from Robin and Josie we got to knock about with pals like Ed Byrne, Chris Addison and Jo Neary, who certainly aren't like the classic comedians of my own day in that they're not alcoholic right-wing chronic depressives. Then our great friend (and this-issue *Dodgem* debutante) Oscar Zarate, a lonely Gaucho boy who misses the Pampas, turned up in company of his former collaborator and another old mate, Alexei Sayle, and topping off the evening I got to meet personal hero Barry Cryer and gave him an

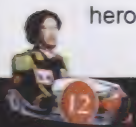
embarrassing showbiz hug when he was going onstage just as I was coming off. And then later I followed him home. And watched him sleeping in the eerie green light of his bedside radio alarm clock.

That was pretty much it until after Christmas. During the festive season we both hibernated...that's me and Melinda rather than me and Barry...with me retaining my urine in the manner of a cave-bear so that my body would have the potassium to maintain muscle-tone in the event of an attack by predators. Melinda got on with her marvellous and frankly frightening autobiography, again with its first chapter being published in this issue for the first time anywhere, and I read my way through the half-million or so words that I've already written of Jerusalem, anxious to see whether it was as halfway-decent as I remember it being, or just page after page of a single repetitive phrase like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. Of course, it was the latter, and now everybody's dead and I only exist looking hammered in a black and white photograph of this house as it was in 1928 or something. No, only kidding. It's actually okay. I've since written another couple of chapters, so only seven more to go and then you can all tell me it's not as good as *D.R. & Quinch*.

New Year came and went, and the political chill in the air became gradually more noticeable. I remember last year when Paul Smith of *Blast First* and Iain Sinclair were trying to set up their Hackney Dissenting Academy, on the model of local saint Phillip Doddridge's similar institutions back in the eighteenth century. Then all the promised funding just evaporated and Paul wrote me a note explaining things, in which he suggested that the only way forward for any of us would probably be a return to the underground scene that we emerged from. I personally think that Paul is dead on the money, but that isn't to say that re-establishing an underground to return to is going to be easy.

Case in point: in early January, Calluz calls with her and Joe's proposal for the future of *Dodgem Logic*. I'd originally said that I could fund things for six issues, and that if in that time it could come to support itself then we could carry on indefinitely. That became eight issues, and although the readership was steadily

increasing with each issue, the fact that we don't want paid advertising on principle and that distribution of a wilfully eccentric publication like *Dodgem Logic* is always going to be a problem means that the magazine has never broken even. Which of course means that it's made a hefty loss. That's okay, in that it's something that I was prepared for, but it's obviously something that can't just go on forever. At the same time, everybody who's involved in *Dodgem Logic* loves it, feels it's necessary, and wants it to continue. So, what Calluz and Joe proposed was that we end volume one of the magazine with this issue, issue #8. We then take a break during which we keep up a presence with lots of new content on our redesigned website. Then, if we can work out a way to make the mag viable and self-supporting, we bring it back as a restyled publication for volume two, maybe later this year or early next year. That's *if* we can work out a way to make it viable. A multitude of fantastic people are offering us their help with this, so the situation is by no means bleak. Robin Ince is working to set up some sort of high-profile *Dodgem Logic* benefit event in the summer, with a slew of great comedians and a few fantastic bands trying to drum up some working capital, and we've been talking to Alex from the recently re-launched *Mustard* and Casper from *The New Humanist* in the hope of picking up a few tips on doing this sort of thing properly. Yeah, I suppose a business plan would have been a good idea, thinking back, but on the other hand, if I'd had a business plan I'd probably never have attempted *Dodgem Logic* in the first place, which would have been a tremendous shame. I'm really proud of this mag, of everyone who's contributed to it, and of what is probably the hippest readership of any publication in the world. However things pan out, for my part it's been a tremendous privilege to be involved in this, and I wouldn't change a moment. I think that the way this century is shaping up, we badly need something like *Dodgem Logic*. In a conversation with Dick Foreman, he remarked upon the nebulous political and ethical consensus that appeared to be emerging from amongst our wildly diverse roster of contributors, while Stewart Lee was talking about how the notion of a magazine entirely focussed on an ordinary location like Northampton had seemed less peculiar and more appropriate with every passing issue and with each new round of community-crushing



coalition cuts. We all want this to work, we know that you do too, and we're doing all we can to make that happen. In the words of inspirational 1930s Zen bank robber John Dillinger, 'Everyone lie down on the floor and stay calm.'

Anyway, in early January I get a call from Stew asking me to appear on a TV show that he's doing, in my capacity as a respected expert on alternative history. At first I'm a bit worried that this is going to be some new series of his scabrous *Comedy Vehicle* in which my radical viewpoints will be held up for the cheap mockery that is Lee's stock in trade. But, no, it's being made for BBC2, so I imagine that it's some sort of sweeping intellectual documentary which will show me in my best light. Besides, Stewart and his wife, the comedian and giant ant Bridget Christie, have just produced a gorgeous new daughter, Daisy, dead spit of her mum, and if you can't trust a man who's contributed to something as pure and innocent as a beautiful little baby, then who can you trust? It's only when I find myself standing in a disused WWII bunker just outside Chalfont St. Giles, staring blankly at a trough half filled with tins of Spam and half filled with cocaine, that I realise I have once more fallen prey to the provincial naivety that has dogged me throughout my catastrophic excuse for a career.

Later in January, Norman Adams gets in touch to ask if I can go down to the threatened library in Jimmy's End and do a reading in an effort to stave off the cuts that could turn ordinary working people into helpless glassy-eyed illiterates within a generation. Since I'm currently shamelessly plundering Norm's life for the chapter of *Jerusalem* I'm writing at that moment, and since I'm also working with Mitch Jenkins on an out-of-control film project that happens to be titled Jimmy's End, I don't see how I can refuse. Meanwhile, Norm's on the case himself. He goes down with his anarchist posse and a load of paperback books to the Vodafone outlet in Abington Street, where he sets up a guerrilla reading room. When the bewildered staff inform him that he's not allowed to do this, he replies that if Vodafone would pay their estimated £6 billion tax liability then we could keep our libraries open and he wouldn't have to do it. Good old Norm. He really puts the logic in *Dodgem Logic*. The actual reading on February 5th goes pretty well. I do the ghost story from

last issue in an inexplicably camp northern accent, Tony Clarke reads a tribute to the immortal Dr. Seuss and me and Calluz meet up with a couple of readers from New Zealand, roller derby queen Psycho Sis and her probably-biased trainee roller derby judge partner, the potential Judge Mental. They give us a free lift up to the Dodgem Bunker from Jimmy's End, and then we have the nerve to charge them for an Astro Dick T-shirt. Everyone's a winner!

Then, of course, in mid February my old friend Charlie Sheen contacted me to ask what he should do about his image problem. I was still working my way through all the Spam and cocaine left over from Stewart's show at the time, so I just urged him to be himself. 'I mean, Charlie, look at me', I screamed through a mouthful of reconstituted meat product. 'I'm on a drug, and it's called Alan Moore! If you were to take it, your face would melt and your two blonde teenage housemates would weep over your smoking remains!' Charlie was avidly taking notes and I was really getting into the swing of it when the faintly-psychedelic door-chimes rang. On answering the door, I was surprised and a little embarrassed to find casual acquaintance Muammar Gaddafi on my front doorstep, looking hopefully up at me with his tiny little puppy-dog eyes, like those of a stillborn pit-bull. I'd met him at an arms fair in Tripoli years ago and said 'If you're ever in Northampton, look me up', but to be honest I hadn't really expected him to take me up on it. Anyway, I asked him in on the condition that he sat quietly taking notes next to Charlie on the sofa, so that I could continue with my bizarre and rambling Spam-flecked diatribe. 'My sexual prowess is such that compared to me, Errol Flynn, Frank Sinatra, Casanova, the Hillside Strangler and even Sid Little were all just saggy-eyed little children! It's raining! Is it raining? I am exactly like the Queen of England, and all my problems are being caused by Al Qaeda and the BBC, who tricked me into going on a WWII Spam-and-cocaine comedy programme! Plan A is to get *Dodgem Logic* going again! Plan B is to get *Dodgem Logic* going again! Plan C is to live and die in Libya! I'm sick of pretending I'm not special! Whoooooh! Too much!'

It was pretty much the same basic speech that I'd given at the St. James's End library. And on both

nights at the Bloomsbury Theatre, come to think of it. And at my brother Mike's house after Christmas dinner. Anyway, in the stunned silence that followed my flight of oratory, Charlie and Muammar both stared up at me in what I like to think was awe. They timidly asked me if I really thought my Class 'A' drug and mystery meat approach could work for them. I smiled down at them a little patronisingly, the way that I generally do with people, and I told them exactly what I told Calluz and Gav and Alix from Hoax and everybody else back when we started *Dodgem Logic* all those months ago, from the bottom of my hash-eating, sock puppet-worshipping heart.

'Of course it will work, my little ones. What could possibly go wrong?'

Thank you. You've been a great audience. Hopefully, we'll see you after the break.



Lord, Mr Ford

by Melinda Gebbie

Helen and Ruthie were playing in the butter-yellow square of sunlight in the centre of the kitchen lino. Helen, being five, was better able to move her apple-dolly in time with the dreamy music from the gramophone in the parlor. Ruthie, being only two, watched Helen's hand dance the little figure across the russet square, and into the brown star, where she tried as best as she could to hold her little doll erect. Here came the little figure, and as it reached the corner of the star, the straw leg kicked out and Ruthie's doll flew squares away. Ruthie let out a sob of dismay, and Aunt Leota came rustling in with a tch tch and swept the smaller child into her arms.

"You must be kinder to Ruthie," she cooed, "She's not as strong as you. There, there, little one." Her affectionate voice went on, "Mommy and Daddy will be home soon. They've only gone out for a ride in their lovely new automobile."

Helen turned her back on them both and stared glumly at the woodstove. Ruthie was lucky she played at all. It was much better before, when she was the apple of everyone's eye. Now they all seemed to find everything that Ruthie did wonderful. She stood up and walked to the door, where she played with her cut glass handle, anticipating her father's return. She loved his jet-black hair, all smoothed with oil, and his deep dark eyes. She knew somehow, no matter what, that she was his best girl.

Aunt Leota finally stopped fussing over Ruthie. She went to the porcelain sink and began cutting lemons for lemonade. Helen's dour little face was hiding her delight in the promising preparations. With her hand firmly wrapped around the doorknob, she eyed Aunt Leota's backside, the starchy apron bow, the pale blue ruffled skirt, and was secretly glad that grown-ups only spent a small amount of time being silly babies.

Rubbing her thumb across the cool shapes of the knob, she kept her eyes on Leota's weathered hands, moving from the yellow slices on the cutlery-board, to the sugar bowl, and finally, to the glasses in the cupboard, as they were brought down.

The lacquered tea tray came out, with its scene of happy clowns, some of the faces and the gay costumes chipped with age, but still bright with golds and reds and greens, and the three glasses, two small and one big, were set upon it, as well as the cut-glass pitcher full of cloudy, refreshing juice, and Leota led the two girls out on the porch.

When she was quiet and did as she was told, Helen almost liked Ruthie. Helen got on the porch swing and Ruthie sat beside her. The wicker table was pulled up, and the tray set upon it. Aunt Leota poured, and the girls were given glasses.

"Now hold it, my dear," said Leota as she gave the glass to Ruthie. "Both hands now." Helen and Leota watched as Ruthie spread her little fingers as far as they would stretch around the tumbler.

Helen idly wished that Ruthie would drop her glass all over her pink gingham dress and that Leota would become so distraught that a spanking would be called for, at which point Helen would be given her fish-shaped wooden paddle which hung next to the embroidered "God bless Our Happy Home" and be told it was her solemn duty to give Ruthie several mighty whacks on the bottom. Eagerly, she watched as Ruthie clung to the smooth glass, put her little mouth to the rim, and successfully, if not noisily drank her juice right down. Helen's blue gingham dress did not have a spot on it. She'd been very careful all day not to sit in dirt, and not even to scuff her shoes. The baby could be as dirty as she liked and somehow that was alright. Helen was getting a bit bored, staying clean and waiting for her parents.

"Where did they go?" she piped.

"You saw the big black automobile didn't you?" Leota replied. "Well, it's the first automobile in Downer's Grove. They wanted to show it around to the neighbors, I expect. All them with their horses and buggies will be amazed. Too bad Uncle Willy missed their going out. Jesse with her purty red hair all done up in her best hat with the white scarf, and our Elmer in his best suit and bowtie." Leota sighed as she wiped her glasses and put them away. Helen loved Uncle Willy. His gentle face, freckled and fair.

He didn't seem to take favorites between the girls. He just liked to sit and read his newspaper in the rosewood rocker and tell Helen in a faraway voice about goings-on in the world, while he smoked his pipe.



Staying with Uncle Willy and Aunt Leota was always good. She and Ruthie slept in little yellow beds sat next to each other with soft bedding and little quilts with flower baskets sewn on them. Morning time they would wake up to the smell of pancakes and butter and pad onto the kitchen linoleum to sit in their painted chairs in their smocked flannel nighties.

After breakfast they were given the funny papers to look at. The Yellow Kid and the Katzenjammer Kids were bright with colored inks. If it was a Sunday, the only day the funny papers came out, they were expected to go to the little Presbyterian church. The girls were ushered into Bible class, where they looked at pictures of saints, and after an oatmeal cookie, were brought back among the shiny wooden pews to sit next to Leota and Willy and hum along with the songs about loving Him and being nice to lambs.

Home by buggy and Sandy, the chestnut mare, to the smell of roast and vegetables in a big enamel basin. Helen would lay out the tableware, Uncle Willy would lift the needle from the gramophone, the roast would be set in a big china dish, surrounded by fresh carrots, halved, sweating potatoes and shucked corn or peas, all from the vegetable patch that Mommy kept in such an orderly set of rows.

Mommy, with her glinting red hair, tied back in a bun with soft golden tassels laying to either side of her pink and white face, her mouth almost always in a smile. With eyebrows like bird wings, her eyes seemed that much bluer, under orange lashes. Daddy, coming in from the fields, brown arms, rolled sleeves, his dark eyes squinting from the bright outdoors, throwing himself into his green, Daddy-shaped chair that even the cat never sat in. As Momma would pass, with dust broom, or cloth in her hand, he would rise, grab her round the waist and pull her into his arms and they would be a bundle of ice-cream colors, the brown around the pink and white all squeezes and laughing.

Her tummy felt restless. She ran outside and gazed at the fields. The one to the left was full of grazing cows. The bull was not with them, so she could just reach the latch and go in. Daddy'd told her they were Jersey cows, the best for creamy, rich milk. She tried to count them all, but got bored after 28. They all looked sleek, with their brown and white coats. Some had calves, and she learned to stay away from the babies. She's also been told that you should never look at a cow directly, as that made them nervous. You had to look side-on as if you'd looked almost by mistake. Side-stepping the steaming patties, remembering she was supposed to keep her shoes clean, she waked carefully back to the gate.

Near the house was her favorite tree. A huge mulberry with twisting arms that had been there since before she was born. A small outgrowth on the tree afforded her to step up to a higher crutch. As she hopped toward her silent friend, she spied a tiny blue glass pitcher half-covered by soil. It was smaller than her thumb. Rough grass grew in a patch nearby, and she picked two dandelions, bright and golden. She stuck them into the tiny vase and carefully, watching her strapped shoes for marks, climbed the tree. She snuggled into the natural seat of the mulberry and fluffed her skirt and petticoat out and away from harm.



She was looking at the light through the pure blue of the little pitcher and the dandelions looked like great chrysanthemums as she twisted their stems back and forth. When she looked at the ground again, she noticed two long shadows moving across the ground. One was fat and one thin. They rolled over the rock garden that had been laid in memory of Vincent, their golden retriever. They rolled over the geraniums planted in a circle around the stones. They rolled over the stump that Helen used for her tea-parties. Their shadows dipped into the little pond where frogs began their lives in a whole different shape and then escaped to sing in the grass a few weeks later. When the dark of them flattened against the lattice under the porch, Helen sat up straight and put her toy down. The two men knocked on the porch door, and she could see the blue of Leota's skirt as she let them in.

Helen got down carefully from the tree, still managing to scratch her arm but it wouldn't bleed on her dress, it was too high up. She walked slowly toward the house. Sitting carefully on the porch swing without letting it rock, she tried to overhear what was being said. Getting up carefully from the swing and holding steadily, she slowly stood and tiptoed to the screen door. The fat man and the thin man were wearing the same dark clothes. They'd taken their hats off and she could see the greasy ring that was left on both their heads. The fat man had a deep rumbling voice. She could hear the word "Mam". Aunt Leota's hands were covered in flour. She was wearing the apron Helen liked best. It was frilly and featured pockets that were outlined in a small pink cherries. Aunt Leota slowly sat down. She wasn't looking at the men. Her hands folded themselves in her lap, like two white swans, going to sleep.

The men just stood there. What did they want? She wanted them to go away. They weren't part of her afternoon, or her family, or her kitchen. They were like ugly, wrong pictures stuck in a paste-up book. She wished them away. She shut her eyes tight and clenched her fists, wishing them to know how much she didn't want them there. Please don't give tem something to eat or drink, she thought. Don't be nice. Don't smile at them, Auntie! The kitchen was silent, except for the stew bubbling in the pot. She promised she'd eat even the fat on the meat, if only they'd go away now!

The cat, Booboo, came to the screen and cried for Helen to pet him. The big man turned around and Helen saw his face. He was a strange color like raw meat and his eyes, a murky green, sat alone in baggy sockets. His lower lip hung down on his chin, like a fat worm. She didn't want to know what he said. She ran to her tree, forgetting about keeping clean.

Six and three quarter miles down the narrow dirt road, Elmer and Jesse's car had come to rest. Poplars lined the road and the graceful curve had always been a bit tight for two horses and carts to pass. There was always time, however, to pull slightly to the left, onto the grass, when you heard hoof beats and the squeaking of the dry wooden cartwheels coming from the opposite direction.

Jesse and Elmer were just getting used to how the scenery seemed to flow by a continuous ribbon of green, her admiring face beaming up at her handsome driver at the wheel, and although the Model T Ford was a bit noisy, considering it was full of mysterious pistons and gears and a big new engine and such, she couldn't help but feel that they were the very symbol of the modern age.

Elmer looked confident and in control. Jesse wrapped her scarf so that it wouldn't keep flying in their faces. She scooted twice around the softly padded leather and beamed out through the eisinglass as she reached out to lightly touch his knee. As she did so, her gaze fell automatically on his legs bent in the shadow of the dashboard, a wonder of gauges and dials and quivering arrows. When she looked up again, she only had a moment to not believe her eyes: There, like a strange mirror, was the same car, so close before them she only had time to check if it was indeed her and Elmer in the front seat looking back at them.

As the eisinglass fractured, and the shiny black hood crumpled and the two couples met head-on in the velocity of a new age, Illinois' first car crash occurred.

Passers-by didn't know what to think. A ten-year old on his brother's bicycle saw the mountain of metal folded like a dressing gown, with four people covered in red, and he thought stupidly of the joke, 'What's black and white and red all over', before he had to wobble onto the grass verge to be sick.

A staunch, beribboned wife and top-hatted partner on their way to a wedding pulled their cart on to the verge and began sobbing. The groom ran to one car and attempted to lift the pale redhead in the white hat.

"I think she's breathing, I think she's breathing," he repeated as he laid her carefully on the trunk of their vehicle.

Out of shock, in respect, he went to the other car and tried to lift the young woman out of her seat. He ignored the soft crack of cartilage and the wrong way her knee was bent, as he pulled her under the flaccid arms, around the wet rosettes of her ribcage. He put his lips to hers and held her small jaw between three fingers. Blowing gently, he waited for her small chest to swell. After several tries, he stood back, and put his morning-grey top hat slowly over her face.

When he lifted himself into the buggy, his beribboned partner looked at him sore-eyed. "Where is your top-hat?" He looked around blankly. He stepped down, and walked over to the car, the girl, and the hat. Whispering an apology to her, he picked up the symbol of gentrification and brought it back to the cart, numbly in hand.

"Well, put it on," she said. The rim, clouded with sanguine evidence was returned to its proper place and the buggy clattered away.





News of the event got around. Men, women, and even children found their way to the sight, to gasp, cluck, dawdle, even touch the two couples, their wounds turning brown under their finery. Two little boys ran around the wrecked cars, playing hide and seek, with slingshots, until a stone launched in playful excitement hit hard and the gawpers all cried in protest and their mothers pulled them back.

No one knew quite what to do, or how to clean it up. Buggies went back and forth between two towns looking for doctors, funeral attendants and dray-horses and buggies strong enough to pull the metal carcasses off the road. A reporter from the local gazette arrived in curiosity and fainted next to the wreck adding to everyone's problems.

Back at the farm, Aunt Leota had wandered outside, her hands to her head, hair gone white from the flour. Helen instinctively stayed away from her, knowing that once her questions had been answered that nothing would be the same again.

At the oil-clothed kitchen table Leota wiped at a stubborn spot of gravy that clung like a dimpled fossil to the shiny surface. Helen ran upstairs to get comfort from her stuffed toys, which lay in a careful ring around the chenille out-post of her bed. She reached for blue Gingerbread Bunny and Jumbo the elephant. The two toys soothed her to sleep every night. Jumbo was grey with wise, beautiful pink eyes, and Gingerbread Bunny had bows of colored thread on his arms and legs. It was them, most of all, whom she cried to and it was they who knew her saddest thoughts.

Aunt Leota hadn't said a word. Uncle Willy wouldn't be home till dark. The house was quiet. If Mommy and Daddy didn't return soon her dress would be all mussed. She couldn't really make out why, but it was like an awful dream, lying on the pale orange bedspread and feeling like the house was filling up with cold dark water.

She fell asleep with her face settled between Jumbo and Gingerbread. It was early evening when she lifted her head. The bad feeling returned. Ruthie had been laid down in her own bed with her head turned away from Helen. The dress was wrinkled now and Aunt Leota hadn't woken her to change her out of it. She hadn't even taken Helen's shoes off. Lifting Ruthie's coverlet, she saw that Ruthie was still wearing her little pink dress. And her shoes as well. A shock of pain went through her. Feeling like she was moving through molasses, Helen took her shoes off and walked in her white socks to the banister. Her hand on the sugar-bun top of it, she stepped down, holding on to the lady-shaped rail beneath, and as she slowly descended, her fingers touched the hip-shape of each separate wooden peg on the way down.

She listened hard at the bottom of the stairs. The clock in the parlor made a slicing sound before each tock. The purples in the circular rag rug were the color of a bruise. If she stepped across its coiled island, what dark time would she enter? She could see the butter-cream doorway that led into the kitchen, and the end of the table, with a twisted loaf of wheat bread rising on the cutting board. Her eyes stung with tears. It was better to look at the wallpaper in the parlor. The pink and yellow rows of open flowers twining among the green leaves and stems. The cold background of smoky lakeside blue. Where was Uncle Willy? The house seemed like a foreign country, every nook a new, unknowable threat.

By the time her feet had slid to the doorway, unable to keep a sober pace because of the cotton against the dutifully waxed floorboards, she could see Uncle Willy had already come home. He was leaning against the sink and his arms were around Aunt Leota. Her head was resting against his coat-collared. He hadn't even taken his hat off.

Aunt Leota took the girls into the kitchen and bent down to enfold them both in her arms that smelled of cinnamon pastry. It was not like her usual hugs full of warm reassurance. Even though she was holding tight, Helen felt as if she was falling away, and her world was shrinking and dying.

She felt like she was drowning. She didn't need the words, "Your Mommy and Daddy have gone to the Angels." They would never just decide to go somewhere else. Not and leave her behind. Then they would at least have taken her little sister with them, if the Angels were so wonderful.

"I hate you. You're lying. You're mean!" She struggled free of Leota, and ran past the bent figures in the parlor, out of the door and into the broken afternoon.





A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS IN THE BLITZ by Michael Moorcock

Dear Jean-Luc,

YOU SAID YOU were curious about my memories of growing up and celebrating Christmas during the second world war. Well, Christmas at that time had a special luminosity, a particular atmosphere which I have never been able to recapture, perhaps because I was born into a world darkened, of necessity, by conflict in which one dull day would be followed by a black, black night sometimes suddenly filled with noise and brilliant explosions.

I remember a tree whose tinsel glowed faintly in the light of a dying fire, standing in one corner of the room where I also slept. Out beyond the blackout curtains, occasionally visible as a momentary glare of yellow light or heard as a screaming drone when some plane spiralled to earth under fire, or the steady thump of the ack-ack, the war in the air pursued its course. I hardly knew why or what was happening. Bombs fell, landscapes changed and occasionally I was even allowed to watch from a darkened room as the searchlights roamed across clouds and silvery barrage balloons, seeking targets.

I'm sure you feel little nostalgia for those times which are marked for most post-war generations by the war films which followed, whether they were stories of the Resistance or epics like *Von Ryan's Express*, but for me the war years are marked by a sense of domestic warmth and a deep, attractive melancholy which I suspect I am forever attempting to reproduce in my fiction: feelings allied to those that come from what Rose Macaulay describes as 'the Pleasure of Ruins', a romanticism not so much for the vanished splendours of the past as marked by a sense of human aspiration thwarted, of beauty destroyed, of surviving memory, which is the enemy of death.

I might have been able to tell you that Germany was attacking England, but more likely I would have said something about 'dog-fights' and 'us' or 'them'. I was absorbed with my Britain's toy soldiers, miniature hollow-cast models of English Tommies, French poilus and American dough boys locked in conflict with the ultra-masculine Germans, in their pointed helmets, whom I imagined flying the planes that I passed through the beams of my battery-powered searchlights, re-enacting under our steel-strengthened dining-room table the conflict which would very much decide my family's fate.

Actually, I always liked the French infantry best, perhaps for the colour of the uniforms, then the English, then the Americans. I must have learned enough not to admire the Germans, who, of course, wore grey, for me never an attractive colour. Even my fleet of tiny battleships seemed dull and though they were distinguished by name and type on the cigarette cards I had inherited from my father's neatly-collected sets ('Modern British Warships', 'Our Modern Navy', or 'Our Maritime Heritage') I never could summon much interest in them. The planes at least had brown and green camouflage and could be given thrilling noises as they closed in on their targets.

Of course my army wasn't exactly up to date, any more than our real armies had been in 1939. It consisted chiefly of my father's boyhood collection added to by what had been presented to me at birthdays and Christmas. I had rather more cavalry than was currently in action, a lot of auxiliaries dressed as cowboys or Red Indians and rather a preponderance of French zouaves, whose uniforms were considerably more romantic. There were a bunch of rather crudely cast solid-metal 1914 machine-guns. A couple of motorcycle despatch riders. And a bunch of farm and zoo workers, who were ready, I suppose, as the final line of defence. There was a certain egalitarianism amongst them, I will admit. Sets of British soldiers, usually six to the box, consisted of two running men, two kneeling and firing men, two standing and firing men. More elaborate sets would include perhaps two machine-guns, an officer with a sword, two men lying down and firing. They had identical opposite numbers in the German, American and French armies, in identical poses. The cowboys were often armed only with pistols and the Indians with tomahawks.





Before the war began, there had been a natural tendency for manufacturers, mostly Britain's (though there were some inferior makers who tended to supply the bulk of the cannon fodder), to match both infantry, cavalry and artillery exactly one for one. There were, to be sure, no anti-aircraft gun-crews other than British. They came with each gun or searchlight, specially modelled to operate their machines. They sat in little bucket seats to wind their range-finders, or stretched their tiny arms to operate firing mechanisms. There was something of a dearth of airmen, too, all of whom were either English or American and far too big to enter the cockpits of the planes I sailed over their heads.

The dull thump of guns was echoed by my own childish imitations: "*Bam! Bam! Kerrump!*"

The red boxes that the tiny materiel had arrived in became houses, aircraft hangars, barricades. The dark floral carpet was fields and cushions were hills. As the bombs outside whined down, I would crawl into a world bounded on four sides by heavy wire mesh into which had been let a small door. The mattress and pillows were a haven for my other comforts, the soft toys — patchwork rabbits, curly-furred dogs, Mickey and Minnie. Even then I was identifying with the Mouse. Not the middle-class, long-trousered Mouse of sanitized 1950s Disneyland, but the original, aggressive, trickster Mouse whose ancestors were Brer Rabbit and Tom Sawyer. That Mouse sported an evil grin and took cunning revenge on his enemies, mostly muscular cats and dogs in baggy pants supported by a single strap.

Christmas 1944. Home-made bunting, red, green, gold, silver, hanging in every room of the house. The candles flickering to life on the tree, wax dripping over the holders. You had to be careful. Many a house was destroyed by its Christmas candles. First a trip to Kennard's, the big, grey Portland-stone department store in Croydon. They had made the most of little, as we had done at home. And suddenly I am looking in awe at an intense colour. I can't take my eyes off it. A colour I have never seen before. If it spelled a word, I wasn't aware of it. Besides, I couldn't read. It is the sign over Santa Claus's grotto. Neon, rescued from some pre-war hoard. A gorgeous, unworldly colour. A heavenly colour. I focused on it as others might have focused on gold nuggets or streaks of silver in a mine. I was looking at indigo. Glowing, pulsing indigo. Even as I passed under the sign into Santa's grotto, all scarlet and white, with a big green tree festooned with the square fruit of brightly-wrapped packages, I could not take my eyes off it. Indigo. Not until I saw *Fantasia*, the following Christmas, would I ever witness such intense colour again. Indigo. And then the enveloping scarlet, soft as my mother's furs, of Santa as I sat on his knee and demanded ponies and — and something else. What is it, young man? What do you want?


I wanted indigo. I wanted to swallow or be swallowed by that colour. With Mickey Mouse and Santa Claus and a long-legged home-made Teddy Bear indigo will always mean Christmas to me. My birthstone, according to some, is Blue Zircon. Blue Topaz or Lapis Lazuli. Blue for a boy, the blues and birthdays, for a memory more vivid than flame shuddering up from a ruined house, of thick, black smoke coiling across a blue, late summer sky. Blue for mother's eyes. Blue for peace. Infinite indigo.

That Christmas, haunted by the memory of indigo, Mickey Mouse would be the first movie I ever saw. I woke up on Christmas Day, just after dawn, unable to sleep for the excitement. The smoke of heavy coke and what little wood we had left. Distant voices. Busy voices. Savoury smells from the kitchen. My mother was up already and my father was doing something outside. I had been dimly aware of activity. Within me built a rising chord of anticipation. I pushed back the covers. The fire in my room was no more than a glow, a few rubies glittering amongst the pale ashes. I crawled out from under the steel-strengthened table and was getting into my dressing gown and slippers just as the door opened and my mother came in. My mother. Dark eyed, loving beauty. My constant.

"It's a white Christmas," she said. "We're having a white Christmas." It's the first I remember. She went to the big French windows and pulled back the heavy curtains so that I could see into our garden. Mrs White, our next-door neighbour, came in. She was holding a red-wrapped parcel. She was laughing. Big, heavy flakes were coming down so thick you could hardly see through them. But outside there was a shape. A dim figure moving about on the lawn, under the bare apple trees. Santa? No, it was too late for him. He would have come and gone with his sleigh and his reindeer when it was night, his passage muffled by the already settling snow. Who was it?

My mother laughed. "It's your daddy," she said. "He's gone mad." My father was out there rolling the snow into huge balls. One for a body, one for a head. He had made a Christmas snowman. As I watched he put pieces of anthracite in for eyes, a stick of dowel for a nose and another for a cigar sticking out of his lopsided mouth. A snowman. What else? I knew what to expect from Christmas. There was no such thing as disappointment. Not then. I watched wide-eyed as my mother got me out of my pyjamas and into my little boiler suit, a miniature of the kind Mr Churchill wore (though I heard later his were silk). And then she led me into the next room, the sitting room, where the tree rose so tall to the ceiling, topped by a tinsel fairy, the branches covered with crimson balls and little, pale tinkling bells. With red, green and white candles, each in its own little tin holder, clipped to a branch.






But this I had already seen. What was new were the green, red and silver wrapped boxes. The strangely shaped things lying on the floor beneath them. And in the grate was a fire so lively and bright, sending its light skipping from golden globe to silver bell, so that the whole room seemed full of movement, full of a warmth and a merriment, a completeness which denied everything in the world outside, where grey reality reared up through the thickening snow doing its best to hide the ruins, the anti-aircraft guns, the craters and the dull, dull blackouts, the eye sockets of houses that would never live again. White as icing on a poisoned cake, it grew thicker and thicker while inside my father came stamping in, laughing as he did more rarely these days, his white breath rising around his head like a halo, slapping his loved hands together, stamping his feet on the thick, wheat-coloured doormat to knock the already melting snow from his clothes, eagerly taking off his overcoat and hat as he shouted 'Merry Christmas' to Mrs White. "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!"

My father, smelling of soap and brilliantine and cologne sat down on the floor with me between his legs and helped me unwrap presents as our black and white Welsh collie, Pat, came running in, half-dried by my mother, to sit panting by the fire and watch, an ear cocked to the radio playing carols and dance music. "There'll be blue-birds over, the white cliffs of Dover... I'm going to get lit up when the lights come on in London... Silent night, holy night..."

Of course, there was a box of soldiers. Red-coated ones this time, in the formal uniforms of the Scots Guards, in bearskins, marching with their shouldered guns. Not the most useful troops, but welcome nonetheless. A field-gun, complete with tiny shells, fired by means of a spring-lever. A Rupert annual from Mrs White, with that little bear always running towards some far horizon over perfect downs and welcoming woods, towards some wonderful adventure from which he would always return to the security of Mr and Mrs Bear and their beautiful cottage. Tiger Tim annual from Auntie Connie. Some Quality Street chocolates, wrapped in gold, silver and coloured cellophane, a picture of a dashing 18th-century soldier and his lady on the box, bought with carefully hoarded ration-coupons, some bullseyes, bigger than my mouth, all brown and black and white stripes. And then the piece-de-resistance – the mysteriously wrapped monster in red paper and tied with silver string – a scooter! A big, solid, wooden scooter, painted dark green and post-office red. Dark, gleaming green. Blazing, Hollywood red. A scooter like no other child I knew had ever owned. A scooter to take you into the future, whatever fears it held. A huge, solid machine, with beautifully running rubber-tyred wheels. A scooter I could only run up and down the hall, unable to go out with it until the snow had melted. My father had made it, of course, as he made everything. Beautifully turned on his own lathe in the shed at the end of the garden. It was meticulously finished, perfectly painted, aerodynamically designed as he made everything. He was an engineer. A draftsman. A perfectionist. You could smell the fresh paint on it, mingling with the smell of burning wood and coke from the fire, the cooking smells to which my mother dashed every so often to supervise the lunchtime turkey.

Those are the colours of that first Christmas I remember in detail. Indigo, deep green, scarlet, gold and the blanketing white snow. I'm sure I enjoyed our Christmas lunch and was happy to show off my presents to my uncles and aunts and their American friends from the airfields who began to arrive through the afternoon. There was the smell of tobacco, of beer and whisky, gin and sherry, the loud, happy laughter of my uncles, telling mysterious jokes which made my mother and her sisters squeal with mock outrage, the radio playing Bing Crosby and Carol Gibbons's Royal Canadians, comic patter and crooning, the upbeat tempo of Harry James and Benny Goodman, of Glenn Miller. Coming in on a wing and a prayer – I'm dreaming of a White Christmas – Jingle-bells – and the carpet and furniture rolled back against the walls so that my mother and father, uncles and aunts could fox-trot until the evening when one of our American guests would start to set up the movie projector and there would be Mickey Mouse again, the first movies I had ever seen, in flickering black and white projected against a slightly crumpled bedsheet. I have never since enjoyed a cartoon as much. The projector and movies were borrowed from the American base. Everyone loved them, those courteous Americans. Silently Mickey flew planes in amazing patterns, captained a steamboat, serenaded Minnie.





Only the Americans weren't in civilian clothes. They were glamorous, attractive men whose uniforms were smarter than our own, who produced chewing gum and candy at will from their infinite pockets. They had brought me Captain Marvel comics. Unlike the black and white English comics, these were in full colour, like Mickey Mouse Weekly. Captain Marvel, with his white hussar's cloak trimmed with gold, in his red suit with the yellow flash across his chest, looking exactly like Fred MacMurray, whom I would later see in *Double Indemnity*, as powerful and benign an image as Santa, able to fly, to knock the evil scientist Sivana for six, given his powers by someone who actually looked a bit like Santa, the kindly old scientist Shazam. Captain Marvel was part of the Christmas pantheon. I loved Captain Marvel, who seemed pleasantly, even stupidly human, and I hated the rather pious, humourless Superman whom I had never seen, as I had seen Captain Marvel, handing out presents from the Christmas tree.

My family had opened their homes to the American flyers, some of them friends of my RAF uncle who had disappeared while ferrying a Spitfire in Rhodesia and was disappointed to be found in the Bush by rescuers. He hadn't wanted to be rescued, he admitted to me many years later. He had enjoyed his African Christmases and had several African wives, extraordinary status in the village, and no chance of being shot at. He was already burned across his face and body, from where his Spitfire had been shot down in flames and he had had to bale out. And his wife, one of my mother's many powerful sisters, he confided, was a bit of a harridan, though she had seemed very friendly, I thought, to our American visitors. He remained the most handsome man I ever knew, the living exemplar of the modestly heroic flying ace.

My father wasn't a combatant. Like most of the other men in my family he was excused military service. Some were too old, or unfit or, as in his case, were doing necessary war work. I grew up in what was essentially a matriarchy. One of the first fictitious characters I ever identified with was Jo March of *Little Women*. Jo March had known how to celebrate Christmas. She's introduced to us discussing the subject. "Christmas isn't really Christmas without presents..." I would later see Judy Garland play her. Or was it my heart-throb June Allyson? Those girls also had an absent father, away fighting for the Union in the American Civil War. Mine, of course, wasn't fighting. I think he was already involved in one of the several affairs he enjoyed as the only good-looking young man at Phillips, the electrical firm where he worked on the radar which was helping us beat the apparently overwhelming Nazi forces. (A couple of Christmases later, his presents to me consisted of sheets of linen taken from his drawing offices, a box of pencils and a ruler. Looking back, I can assume he had missed the shops. It was, after all, on a Christmas Day that he had told my mother he was spending the holiday with his mistress; that he was leaving her).

I would never see my father on Christmas Day again.

I have to admit I mostly remember my father in terms of the Christmas presents he gave me – his own collection of cigarette cards, toy soldiers, his beautiful, multicoloured marbles, his water-colour box, the tricycle and the full-size Norton motorbike frame and untired wheels which he told me he was working on for me. He had also given me a Hornby clockwork train set which he took back in order to trade it for the bike frame. I remember one sharp December afternoon standing beside him in his workshop at the end of our garden, near the underground shelter we hardly ever used.

"This is going to be yours," he assured me, as I held the oil-can for him. "You can have it for Christmas when you're sixteen." My birthday was a week before Jesus's, I knew. But I also understood his promise to be an abstraction. I knew the bike was really his and that, even if I was old enough to ride it at that time so far, far into the distant future, I probably wouldn't. He hadn't been able to resist it. "Your father loved bikes more than he loved us," my mother would tell me.

Even dressed as Santa, my father would reveal himself by his neatly pressed flannels, his fastidiously clipped finger nails. In spite of my uncle, the RAF hero, my father was the embodiment of elegant masculinity for me from his neatly cut fair hair to his smartly polished brogues.

At some point in time between Christmas and New Year's, I got the train back again. I don't remember what happened to the Norton. A busy trade would often occur between the children of the neighbourhood. Some time after Boxing Day, when I swapped my tricycle with a neighbour's child for a different clockwork Hornby locomotive, my mother had stepped in and stopped the deal. After the train set was returned, I never saw the Norton again. It disappeared with the melting snow. I later wondered if this was one of the issues which had led to his leaving us on Christmas Day 1946. I had little affection for him at that time. I felt no pain at his departure, probably because he lacked the nerve to tell me he was leaving. Besides, all boys of my age had absent fathers. Many of them, like me, would grow up in mother-run homes.





But that first Christmas I remember, the bombs grew infrequent. The decorations were still up when my mother and I mounted the electric tram, whose brass rails sliced through the remains of the slushy snow, to go up to the centre of the city, to visit my Uncle Jack at 10 Downing Street. He hadn't been able to spend Christmas with us, so we went to lunch with him and my Aunt Ivy, a rather pious Christian who didn't believe in too much pleasure. Uncle Jack had been on duty. He worked for Churchill. "Happy New Year, my boy!" beamed the old warrior-drunk, puffing avuncularly on his vast cigar and smelling strongly of tobacco and brandy. I think he would have offered me a glass of brandy if my mother hadn't been with me. He did, however, give me the benefit of his wisdom that afternoon. "Never be tempted to vote Liberal," he said.

My uncle loved him. After tea with my uncle we went to Oxford Street and Regent Street, where the big toy shop was and where I could spend the money I had been given for birthday and Christmas. My Uncle Jack always gave me a ten shilling note. With this and my other cash I could replenish my miniature armies. This was the equivalent of an FDR loan to the British military. My mother couldn't afford to buy me more than a box at a time, mostly restricted to infantry, though she might add the occasional tank. But with my Christmas wealth I could add to my cavalry, to my Indians and my cowboys, perhaps to my anti-aircraft batteries.

Then, as we left Hamley's or Gamaçes or one of the other emporia supplying my reinforcements, my heart would leap with pleasure at the sound of the aircraft siren, warning us of an attack. I knew what this meant. One of the rarest of pleasures. To my enormous delight, we were forced to descend into the underground, to the depths of the Central Line, and join our fellow Londoners, some of whom lived there almost permanently. It would mean I could sleep on a platform with all the other people who would rather risk being buried alive or drowned than remain overhead in the dangerous, blacked out streets. I used to hope for a bombing raid so that we could enjoy the adventure, the subterranean camaraderie and what didn't seem like a false security to most of us. Some had given up by then. They expected to die.

Back at home, the Christmas holidays were still in force. My father disappeared again. From Boxing Day to the first full week in January we were free not only to play with our new planes, Roy Rogers cap pistols or other treasures, we were let out, wrapped tightly in little coats and scarves and mittens, to explore the surrounding destruction, a wonderland. There was only one condition. If we heard an air-raid siren, we were to come straight home. As my father's snowman melted in the back garden, I followed older friends over ruins which became defensives. Nevada hills, the Sheriff of Nottingham's castle. We climbed through the piled snow-topped rubble filling doorways, found staircases still intact, mounted them with practised balance as they swayed beneath our feet, reaching the second storey where whole rooms remained, sliced as if with a knife, everything in perfect condition — bathrooms, bedrooms, store-rooms — and if we were lucky we found unlooted booty, including toys, saucepans, kettles and books. Christmas made us greedy for more and more wealth.

We became adept as high-wire artists at crossing the beams, all that remained of destroyed floors and roofs, glancing insouciantly down at the broken rooms some of which were still decorated for Christmas, with trees and tinsel. But these did not interest us. We learned to unroll lead from roofs and gutters, which the older kids hoarded or sold to scrap metal dealers. The dealers made us put the lead into shopping bags or baskets so that our trade went unnoted. Churches were by far the richest source of lead, especially those which had stained glass windows. The coloured glass was sometimes picked up before Christmas to make decorations. But we searched constantly for the Holy Grail of any boy's collection — a piece of shrapnel which was more than tortured metal twisted like barley-sugar sticks, but recognisable as part of a plane. What we longed to find were whole pilots, whose goggles and parachutes, flying suits, helmets and perhaps even pistols we could scavenge.





We grew up instinctive scavengers. Vulture chicks hunting for choice tid-bits, for treasures we could carry home and show off to our parents and friends. We worked with busy efficiency and concentration, desperate to get the most we could before the Christmas holidays were over.

The snow never lasted for long in the city. For a while it gave a pristine, pseudo-virginity to our wrecked landscapes. As it melted, the old reminders of our situation, all the symbols of destruction, began to re-emerge. And, as school loomed, we became all the more frantic. How we longed for an unexploded anti-aircraft shell or a bomb or other ammunition to complete our Christmas collections. Shell cases were common currency and generally disdained. We had learned how to clamp the live shells and then set off the firing pins by putting a nail against them and striking them with a hammer. We tried to dig out the graphite, the powder, to make our own guns. Nobody seemed to think there was anything unwholesome in our warlike pursuits. Or perhaps their imaginations didn't stretch to how we were entertaining ourselves. Presumably, they had no idea how long the war would last. We might need those skills when we were adults.

I don't remember too many dogfights around Christmas, however. I somehow had the impression that the Nazis and the Allies broke for Christmas, much as we did for school. But I had seen some of the fiercest air-fighting. For years I thought that watching the Battle of Britain through the windows of our house as the Spitfires and Messerschmitts wheeled and flared in a darkness speared by shafts of yellow light, had been nothing but a false memory, something inspired by watching movies. I put this to my mother a few years ago. "Oh, no," she said, "you saw the Battle of Britain. We were between three airfields, Biggin Hill, Croydon and another one whose name I forget. I used to hold you up to the window to watch the dogfights. They were amazing. And they kept you quiet when you were teething or whatever." Perhaps that's why I've never sought the distraction of war movies. The real thing was so much more exciting. And, in an almost mythical fight, we actually won command of the skies.

During those quiet Christmas times, when it seemed Hitler's Luftwaffe was permanently beaten, we enjoyed incredible freedom which would be unknown to our own children. In our little grey suits of flannel windjammers and shorts, shirts and jerseys, twice-tied black Oxfords, ties askew and hair sticking up like the wire which jutted dangerously from the blasted remnants of reinforced concrete, we were forever dusty.

That this was the dust of the doomed and the dead never occurred to us. That bodies might still lie undiscovered in those cellars or that the rust on exposed pipes might be blood was never mentioned by our elders and therefore never considered by us. We were told it was dangerous to climb the ruined houses, but we knew anyone could learn that skill. We were told to watch for 'bad men' lurking in the wreckage or in the bushes and copses of the nearby common and golf-links, so we kept our distance from adults. But the rest of the world was ours as it never would be again. The world was unbordered. All its walls had been smashed down. We came upon large, abandoned houses with stables and outhouses. We ranged through glass-roofed conservatories. We found tools and glue in the workshops. We learned to walk on roofs. The movie *Hope and Glory* catches some of this atmosphere but seemed bland to me compared to the richness of the reality.

When the flying bombs came back the next Christmas we returned to the shelters, the reinforced tables, the dugouts. My grandmother was Jewish, my father unmistakably Anglo-Saxon. She would sit across from him in the big communal shelter, which nobody really trusted. She would hug her thermos flask and her packet of sandwiches as we heard the drone of the V1s overhead, then the sudden silence as their engines cut out, then the shriek of their passage earthwards as they hit Dahlia





Gardens and Northborough Road and Mitcham Lane and all the other suburban streets laid out by planners in the twenties, following the course of the railways to build bijou Tudor-style mansions for the upwardly mobile professional classes represented by my father and mother, the first of their families not to live by trade or the work of their hands.

My grandmother knew what would happen to her and presumably her children and grandchildren if the Nazis won. Facing my father in the cramped shelter stinking of sweat and urine she would rock back and forth as if in prayer as we listened to the dull drone of the V1 engines. She had a conceit which she was too intelligent a woman to believe, but she knew it annoyed my father. Her conceit was that if the Germans won the war, then all the Jews would be rounded up, put in concentration camps and killed. But if the English won the war, she insisted, then all the Anglo-Saxons would be rounded up, put in concentration camps and killed.

So she would sit rocking, her finger wagging, grinning into my father's infuriated face. "Better hope the Germans win, Arthur," she would say. "Better hope the Germans win."

It seemed the rockets, when they came, would never stop. British pilots had discovered ways of flying close to the V1s, which were essentially drone aircraft, and nudging them out of the way, but tracing the course of the V2s was almost impossible. And it seemed we were getting more than our fair share of both.

We didn't know at the time that Churchill was deliberately misdirecting those flying bombs, that his departments would report strikes on crucial factories and aeroplane fields when actually all they were hitting were the civilians of South London. As a result of this inspired misdirection, South London received by far the greatest number of strikes. One day the house across the road was a living entity, containing people you knew, who lived much as you did, who tended little rose gardens and wisteria plants and kept their paintwork up to scratch; the next day it would be something else entirely. Something ruined and already in the process of being forgotten. Somewhere to explore, to loot, to roll the lead from. Mrs Archer and the little Archer girls, whom I still miss and dream about – removed. Their blonde page-boy haircuts and pleated grey skirts, their crisp white blouses and school hats are the originals of images I continue to find attractive. But they had gone before I noticed the intimations of sex. That would come a couple of years later when the war was over and we had moved to a timber yard. The smell of sawdust is almost as erotic for me as the smell of garlic or Mitsouku. Mr and Mrs Wall, their pebble-dashed miniature chateau a heap of rubble scarcely worth sifting through, forgotten. 'Auntie' Pat, who had run the corner newsagents and leant me all those wonderful books from her stock – Scott, Stevenson, Ballantine – gone one bright Sunday morning as she laid out the papers ready for delivery.

With my friends, and perhaps with my adult family, I learned never to mourn. To move on. To keep going. To act as if your number was never going to come up. Yet in all other respects we were far from stoical. We always knew, for instance, that we were luckier than the Russians, for instance. 'Mustn't grumble' became a familiar refrain.

How are you?

'Mustn't grumble.'

"Are your in-laws still living with you?"

"Yes. Mustn't grumble..."

It would be a refrain that outlasted the war and allowed restaurateurs, in particular, to get away with horror.

I was sent to infant school in Robin Hood Road, part of the estate planned in that corrupted arts and crafts style which is so characteristic of early 20th-century London, a style it shares on a larger scale with Hollywood, where I always feel immediately at home. I was at school long enough to know what boredom meant, because I could already read and write. The headmistress said she would have to have a word with my mother, because I could not concentrate on the primers. I had in fact ruined one by putting it open, on my brilliantined little head. When she asked what I read at home I said Edgar Rice Burroughs and George Bernard Shaw, which was true. For years I believed that to be taken seriously as a writer one had to have three names.





The yard was in the grounds of a ruined mansion. There was a small two room cottage made of corrugated iron, heated by an old-fashioned cooking range. We moved into that. By the winter of 1947 we were still there. I remember the snow being so deep that the path cleared to the outside toilet was actually higher than my head. We made the trip to the toilet as rarely as possible. I still remember the chamber pots and the stink of them.

By the time the war ended, Britain was massively in debt to America, who had only loaned her the money to fight a war they had advised her against pursuing. She was, like the rest of the European powers, in the process of losing her empire. Her returning soldiers, determined to overturn the old order, which they blamed for their troubles, voted in vast numbers for the Labour government and nationalisation of major industries, the implementation of our National Health Service and a whole programme of reform which it would take Margaret Thatcher to dismantle some 30 years later. We could not afford immediate rebuilding and so London remained in ruins far longer than Germany, by then benefitting from the Marshall plan.

When I was fifteen I left school, determined to become a journalist (I had not yet set my sights on being a novelist) and worked for a shipping company in the City. From there I would go down to the countless miles of docks, filled with ships, with loading cranes and warehouses for as far as the eye could see. My way back would take me through a devastated landscape only slowly recovering from the intensity of the Blitz. I could walk from the river into the depths of the City using as my points of reference the same buildings used by my 18th-century ancestors. It was possible to stand outside the old Billingsgate fish-market, whose porters carried up to 15 baskets of fish on their heads and were famous for their foul language, and look over to the Customs House. As you climbed the hill up towards St Paul's, you could see the Royal Mint, the Monument (to the Great Fire of London) and all the other buildings which had miraculously survived the Blitz while more recent structures, from the 19th century, had been totally blasted into rubble. On the artificial hills, like Celtic burial mounds, grew Rosebay Willow Herb, imported from the slopes of Vesuvius by 19th-century botanists, escaped from Oxford nurseries and now growing wherever there was the ash it loved. You can still see it, blossoming beside the railway tracks which originally carried it from Oxford to London.

You didn't need to make an effort of the imagination to feel the psycho-geography of the place. I have often wondered if the Frenchman who created psycho-geography and the wonderful philosophy of *dérive*, Guy Debord, had witnessed what I had witnessed in London. The very bones of the city, all her history, from Roman times to the present, were exposed and clearly visible. Here was Defoe's city and Johnson's city and Smollett's city, while the city of Dickens, who had turned London into a character, a monstrous entity, was in ruins. Where great warehouses had loomed over black water, now there were green hillocks where, at weekends, Londoners enjoyed their picnics. Where diseased warrens of slums had existed, an indictment to all civilised beings, Hitler's incendiaries had allowed the new socialist government to build attractive estates, designed by idealistic architects, not all of whom, as they later admitted, were misguided followers of Le Corbusier. Some built curving terraces, echoing the half-timbered lines of Tudor streets, though without the *chi-chi* ersatz nostalgia which had characterised south London. Others erected monuments to the people, intended to bring sunlight and sanitation to all.

Even at their most brutal, the new estates were an improvement on the rat-runs thrown up in the 19th century to house the wage-slaves servicing Britain's imperial commerce. And in those noir-ish times every young man desired nothing much more than a trenchcoat and a battered fedora, when Graham Greene, John Loder and the bitter-sweet romantics of the London literary scene came into their own. They were hard times. Poor times. It always seemed to be raining. Even in the Ealing comedies you felt that the rain had only stopped for about ninety minutes and would continue again the moment *Hue and Cry* and *Passport to Pimlico* began to roll their credits. Disenchanted men, old before their time, smoked moody cigarettes and lounged unhappily on the Thames embankment, brooding on lost love and forgotten ideals. Colour seemed almost obscene, an outrage. The late forties and the fifties were black and white years of *Odd Man Out* and *It Always Rains on Sunday*. For a while all my girlfriends wore black and thought a lot about suicide. The novelists and playwrights, the so-called Angry Young Men, people like Kingsley Amis and John Osborne, expressed themselves with bitter laughter. They were still old enough to have swallowed the imperial myth which had betrayed them. By my generation, we had never accepted such myths in the first place and had no particular argument with our fathers, no inclination to shake our fists and yell, 'Damn you, England!' And the poets – Betjeman, Larkin and the rest – wallowed in nostalgia, in melancholy, equally disenchanted, seeking the certainties of their boyhood. Larkin in particular could not bear the idea of being rescued from the black and white world and when it threatened to explode into colour, as it did in the sixties, going from monochrome to technicolour like Dorothy's transportation from Kansas to Oz, he resisted, he grumbled and he sought out the pockets of gloom which even today can be found in the remoter parts of the British provinces.

The Angries were probably not the only ones to yearn for the camaraderie of hopelessness. Many missed the years of anxiety and austerity. For my own part I was delighted to escape the grey years, when one's only choice of trousers was grey flannel or green corduroy. I embraced the sixties. From 1963 to 1976 was my (rough) decade. I knew we had discovered ourselves in a golden age and that it would not last. I became determined to enjoy that age while it did continue.

For a while Stiff revived the feel of those times and then even Stiff was gone. Spontaneity became suspect.





The metamorphosis of Blitzed London became the Chaotic landscapes of Elric the Albino. As in need of his soul-drinking sword as Chet Baker was in need of his junk, he witnessed the death of his Empire, even conspired in it. The adrenaline rushes of aerial bombardment and imminent death informed the Jerry Cornelius stories where London's ruins were recreated and disaster had a celebratory face. And the Holocaust became the background for the black comedies of my Colonel Pyat books. We tried to create a new literature which expressed our own experience – Ballard of his years in the Japanese civilian camp, Aldiss of the terrors of being a boy-soldier in Malaya – all the great writers who contributed to my journal *New Worlds* were rejecting modernism not from any academic attempt to discover novelty but in order to find forms which actually described what they had witnessed, what they had felt. By 1945, Proust and Joyce and even Eliot felt as if they belonged to the 19th century, even if they were indeed that century's greatest products. By 1945, we knew what had happened in Auschwitz and Dachau. We did not mourn the passing of liberal humanism or indeed of our humanity. We sought new ways of expressing them. We found humour in the H-Bomb, we made jokes about Vietnam, we sought our models not in the great moderns like Mann or Faulkner, but in absurdists and the work of Grimmelshausen, Smollett, even Balzac. I myself unearthed a hero in George Meredith, marginalised by the modernist literary critics because he looked back to the 18th century for his models and in so doing spoke to those of us who found ourselves at last in the 21st.



All this experience, all this fiction, all this philosophy had its origins in what for me were the Blitz years, my years of childhood, when I was as unaware of any impending doom as a new-born lamb in a field knows nothing of the slaughterhouse. Circumstances made me something of an autodidact, unable to settle at any school for very long, expelled from a couple. The schools were always glad to see me go. I learned from reading and not knowing what was respectable literature and what was not. I read everything. I became an enthusiast for the blues, in common with many of my generations, and learned some of Woody Guthrie's licks from Jack Elliot. I met Big Bill Broonzy and Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Their music was the music of hard times and though I don't pretend a white Londoner shared the same experience as that of a black Clarksdale share-cropper, that music did find an echo in my soul so that I was also privileged to enjoy the enthusiasms and pleasures of Rock and Roll from its earliest years. I am decidedly a child of my times. And I did inherit some enthusiasms from my father, though we saw so little of each other. It was my father, after all, who left behind the Edgar Rice Burroughs and George Bernard Shaw books, which were amongst the first I read. And he left some jazz records which ultimately led me to the blues. He then did me a great favour by leaving me to the love of my egalitarian mother and the man who fell in love with her (though I suspect never shared her bed) whose name was Jellinek.

Ernst Jellinek had helped Jews escape from Germany and Austria, going in and out of those countries to save as many as he could. Two of my friends, she a Jewish poet, he a Jamaican sculptor, had been trapped in France when the Germans arrived and, I learned from them, it had been the man who had become my unofficial guardian, Ernst Jellinek, who had helped them get across the Pyrenees and from there eventually into Portugal and back to England. If my father had been faithful, I would never have had such a model of quiet, philosophical heroism as Ernst Jellinek. I would never have understood that there is nothing wrong with sticking to one's ideals, to following one's altruistic instincts while remaining, in his case, a practical business man. I have never ceased to be grateful to my father for finding love outside the home...

I don't remember my parents ever quarrelling, though I think I remember a few intense, whispered exchanges. One day when I opened the newspaper I found a piece cut out of it. I believe my mother must have done that. Probably a report of the separation proceedings. People avoided divorce in those days, because it was so hard to obtain.

When I was eighteen, my father came to see me on my birthday, as usual. He gave me an LP record, of T-Bone Walker and we went out for a Christmas drink. Back in his car, he cleared his throat with some embarrassment and told me that he had taken out an endowment policy for me, to help with my education or perhaps marriage when I was 21. I told him that I was earning good money (I was already a successful journalist) and to keep it for himself. Without another word, that's exactly what he did. My own children's birthdays he was always a bit hazy about and it never occurred to him to transfer the policy for their benefit. He remained an emotionally lazy, rather likeable man, who tended to change jobs whenever he was promoted to management, because he could not take the responsibility. But he was an obsessive record keeper.

My father and mother never divorced. It would have involved too much trauma in those days. My father set up home with his mistress and in time she changed her name to his by deed poll. Many years later, when both were in their seventies, my father decided to apply for a divorce. He was afraid of my mother. The first I heard of it was when my mother phoned me, sobbing, to ask if I had spoken to my father recently. Although I saw more of him than she knew, I had not, as it happened, seen him for a while.

"What's the trouble, Mum?"

"He wants a divorce," she said. "I got the papers from his solicitor this morning. Why would he want a divorce after all this time?"

Not long afterwards came the expected call from my father. "Um — does your mother live in Gratwicke Road?"

He had discovered what I had known for over a decade, that by chance they were living about quarter of a mile apart in the same seaside town of Worthing. I had often wondered what would happen if they met. His solicitor, it emerged, was at the bottom of her road. And he was terrified.

They were both so emotionally overwrought by this event that I found myself acting as the mediator in my own elderly parents' divorce, calming both of them down, assuring that neither had sinister or greedy motives.

"If he thinks he's not going to give me that two pounds a week, he'll have to fight me for it," she declared. She had settled, out of pride, for the minimum support which he had always sent late, but never missed a payment.

And so the knot was severed at last. This time I did not receive a visit to the toyshop, but he did offer to give me the family bible. I said that he should hang on to it. That I would have it when he died. I had it expensively rebound for him as a Christmas present.

As it happened, he gave the bible to my cousin, forgetting that he had promised it to me. When he died, I found photographs of all my family except my mother and myself and discovered that his father had remembered everyone in the neighbourhood in his will, but not me. I had been 'vanished'. My mother and I had been an embarrassment, evidence that he and his mistress had been living a lie. I also found every driving licence he had ever owned and, neatly stored in cardboard boxes, the stub of every postal order he had ever bought to send to the court for my mother's and my support. I also discovered that in his youth he had been a passable artist and while I had always assumed that I got my own taste for the arts from the Jewish side of the family, I also discovered, thanks to another friend, that my great-great-great aunt Rachel Moorcock had been a passable poet who had published a book of memoirs and a book of poems in her lifetime.



Outside, the all-clear sirens begin to blast through the early morning light. It's Christmas Day. I get up and find that my mother is already building a fire in the grate. She kisses me and wishes me a Merry Christmas. There are all my presents arranged around the bushy little tree with the candles burning on it.

"Which one shall I open first?" I ask her.

She smiles and shakes her head. "You choose."

I know what I want. The large box. I rip the paper off it and see the familiar maroon red beneath. Slowly I take the top from the box and stare down at the camouflage green of the long-barrelled anti-aircraft gun. I remove it from the box and begin to set it up, settling it on its stand. Soon it is pointing menacingly towards the ceiling.

Once again, Londoners will be able to rest easily in their beds tonight.

(First Draft of a memoir written at the request of my old friend and publisher Jean-Luc Fromental).



Bailiffs

Article and illustration by Calluz

Upon writing this article, I have recently cleared an outstanding council tax debt (with the help of a friend) for the sum of £576 with further charges of £75.40 and bailiffs charges of £237.50. Because I missed two months of council tax payments, Northampton Borough Council demanded the rest of the years council tax paid up front, served as a writ in the hands of a bailiff. An unwelcome visit from the CCS Enforcement Services, on behalf of Northampton Borough Council brought home the severity of the situation. As the CCS states 'we implement the responsibilities of standards, ethics and accountability on your behalf', in this article I intend to look at the ethics involved in debt collection and what Northampton Borough council, like many others, encourage and endorse.

A bailiff, from the Latin term *baiulivus*, is a governor or custodian. A legal officer to whom some authority, care or jurisdiction is committed. A bailiff is someone authorised to collect a debt on behalf of a creditor. As a 'last resort' bailiffs are used by various councils throughout England to chase up outstanding money owed by citizens to the state. According to the Northampton Borough Council 'This will be done if you fail to make an arrangement to pay the debt, break an arrangement or do not complete the information request form'. The 1992 Local Government Finance Act and Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 set out the legal framework that a local authority can use to pursue recovery of a council tax debt from a council taxpayer.

Bailiffs are endorsed by NBC to collect outstanding debts for Council Tax, a tax levied on households by local authorities; based on the estimated value of the property and the number of people living in it. Our contribution to council tax part funds the provision of services which local authorities provide such as schools, parks and open spaces, leisure centers, public transport, social housing grants, CCTV and public transport to name just a few. Ironically when local authorities declare cuts in services, our council tax contributions do not decrease. Furthermore, whilst we as citizens of the state are forced to honor our tax obligations, it appears that large corporations such as Vodafone do not. After ten years of fighting in court, Vodafone have been let off a 6 billion pound tax bill which has been described as 'One of the most shameless, blatant and costly examples of corporate-government cronyism in years'. Now I appreciate this is a distinctly different type of tax, but it is still a financial charge, the same as council tax, which according to the state is a compulsory charge.

When a bailiff visits you they are looking to obtain payment in full, and at the time of contact you will incur bailiff fees for their 'services'. If the bailiff visits you on subsequent occasions additional fees will be payable. If you are unable to pay the debt in full and require time to make the payment the bailiff will normally enter into a walking possession agreement with you. They will make an inventory of goods in your house up to a sale value of the debt and their costs. You will be required to sign this and there will be an additional levy fee and walking possession fee to pay. Provided you keep to your agreement to pay the bailiff there will be no additional costs. Luckily enough, I was able to ask a friend for help. The bailiff wrote me a receipt for the amount I paid, but did not give a break down of what the additional bailiff costs were. I contacted CCS and asked for this information. I received a statement setting out the breakdown of the bailiff costs. To my surprise I had incurred a cost of £150 for hire of a removal van which was never used as I made payment with the 24-hour deadline. When I re-contacted CCS to dispute this fee, I was informed I must put it in writing.

Irrespective of whether this has been an administrative error on their part, my concern is that if an individual was not able to pay the full amount up front when confronted with a bailiff within the 24 hour time scale, and if an individual does not ask for a breakdown of the bailiff fees, from my experience you may very well get shafted. It raises the question how ethical it is to demand council tax payment up front. What right do they have to demand payment for 'services' they have not provided? Many people who have been contacted by bailiffs do not have the money to pay the initial outstanding debt, let alone additional costs for services. What's more, is it ethical for Northampton borough Council to send bailiffs round demanding payment for bailiff fees that don't exist? What if I hadn't demanded a breakdown of the bailiff costs? One might argue that this concern is not the fault of NBC. However, if Northampton Borough Council are sub-contracting debt collection out, they should be held accountable for their misdemeanors, because they have endorsed the debt collector to recover the debit on the grounds that they apparently 'implement the responsibilities of standards, ethics and accountability on your behalf'. Now I argue that in my case I was relatively lucky in how I was dealt with, however there have been various cases recorded where individuals have felt under undue stress when contacted by bailiffs, for example 'a disabled client seen by a bureau in Greater Manchester was left so traumatized by the visit of a bailiff that he moved out of the home



he shared with his partner and two children. The bailiff kicked the door and shouted threats and abuse through the windows prompting the terrified client to pay £50 he could not afford towards a council tax debt that he in fact contested.' In another case 'A bureau in Tyne and Wear saw two clients who were disabled and had retired from work on mental health grounds. The couple were plunged further into debt because they took out a high interest loan to pay off charges imposed by an aggressive and intimidating bailiff. The contact centre used by the bailiffs company refused to hold action on the council tax arrears even though the CAB promised medical evidence which would establish proof of vulnerability.' (Putting bailiffs on the spot, outcomes of the CAB campaign against bailiffs, 2008). In another case, but this time in Northampton, Ms Adams complained about the Council's handling of her housing and council tax benefit claims between November 2004 and March 2006. She said that the Council delayed excessively in processing benefit claims and appeals and pursued recovery of rent and council tax arrears while benefit claims and appeals were outstanding. The Ombudsman upheld Ms Adams's complaints, saying the Council wrongly took repossession action through the courts and instructed bailiffs to collect council tax arrears from Ms Adams while her benefits entitlement was unresolved. He commented that the case highlighted serious failings in the Council's administration of both housing and council tax benefit and in the recovery of rent and council tax arrears. The Ombudsman said: "On this occasion I consider the Council failed to meet ... basic standards of good administrative practice. It made a series of errors in administering Ms Adams's benefit claims and in deciding to take recovery action while these claims were unresolved." During this period of distress Ms Adams raised that she is a single parent who lives with her daughter. Ms Adams was diagnosed with leukemia approximately 18 years ago. Ms Adams has explained to my investigator that her illness causes various problems including tiredness and lethargy. She has also had to undergo regular treatments of chemotherapy which can cause sickness and additional fatigue. Northampton Borough Council overlooked all this and bailiffs were sent to her home. It took Ms Adams three years of battling to get an apology whilst at the same time she was battling cancer.

The Ombudsman stated that The Council did not adhere to its policy of making "every effort" to resolve housing benefit entitlement prior to the matter coming to court, instead putting the onus on Ms E to resolve her outstanding claims. It then compounded these failings by referring the council tax account to the



bailiffs without considering- in accordance with its policy for collecting debt from vulnerable council taxpayers – whether this action was justified. (Local government ombudsman report, complaint June 2007)

In 2001, a review of bailiff law resulted in the Green Paper being passed. It states Enforcement agents should: 'carry out their duties in a professional, calm and dignified manner. This includes dressing appropriately and acting with discretion and fairness'. The CCS enforcement officer that visited my home on behalf of Northampton Borough Council came suited and booted. Why, he looked a true gentleman at first glance. However, as my eyes travelled up towards his torso, I noticed that several of his buttons on his shirt were opened revealing a large chest plate tattoo. It was some sort of script. Now I must declare I love tattoos and I love art. However, I found this exhibition to be a failed attempt at trying to look tough and intimidating, and what's more as it was December time when he visited, I thought he would catch a cold revealing his 'gangster' tattoo. I take exception to an individual attempting to intimidate me, with such a little form (standing at 5'7). However, from the fact he was on my door step making demands, I realized there and then that this 'bum bailiff' meant business.

The bailiff in question informed me that he 'would come into my home and seize any goods to pay off this debit' if I didn't make a payment in full in the next 24 hours. When I addressed this question with 'I'm sorry, what?' (You see I've never had a bailiff visit before, and this abrupt statement had taken me by surprise). He appeared to become quite heightened by my retort. His voice became what I can only describe as stern if not a little aggressive and reiterated that he would seize my goods. Now I took exception to this and having worked with disaffected young people for many years, I got the urge to use my verbal de-escalation skills as if I were talking to a child who was demonstrating anger management problems. I informed him in a soft calm manner that he did not need to take that tone with me, it was unnecessary. Which appeared to disgruntle him further. He repeated, 'If I do not receive payment in full in the next 24 hours I will remove items from your home'. He stated that he would be accompanied by the Police if needs be. On that he turned on his heel and stalked out of the door. Now 24 hours isn't a long time to try and scrape together over £900 and what with it being Thursday morning, it didn't leave me enough time to get to Citizens Advice as they are appointment only. I felt frustrated, frightened, helpless and really fucked off, like most people visited by a bailiff, I'm sure. I walked back to my flat and scanned my front room, envisaging what it would be like bare, because in all honesty they'd have to take all my goods for their value to equate to the 'outstanding' debt. I don't have a TV, or DVD player; it's a room with a settee, various canvasses, spray paint and a work computer. On the back of this, I rang the contact number he had left for the main

contact number for CCS hoping I could set up a repayment arrangement. To my dismay once I'd typed in my reference number it immediately diverted my call to the bailiff. I tried again, and again, each time getting the same guy repeating no you are not able to speak to anyone else other than me.

With the 24hr deadline looming, and feeling helpless I asked a friend whether he could help me out on the basis that I would pay him back, which he did and for which I am very grateful. However, not everyone is as lucky as I was and not everyone can pay back their debt and because of any delay in making a payment, this incurs further costs. Once in this cycle, it is almost impossible for someone with limited resources to claim their items back. Which begs the question how ethical is that? How ethical is it for Northampton borough Council to endorse such schemes? I hadn't realized that NBC's aim, through debt collection, was to render you powerless.

Once I had borrowed the debit amount, I re-contacted the bailiff. He informed me he would come back before 8pm that day to collect his recovery. I was surprised to see that the bailiff had changed his attire. This second visit he was more casually dressed, had very strong cologne on and had applied more gel to his hair. I could see it glistening in the light. In a perverse way, whilst handing over the cash, I felt a sense of flattery that he had made such an effort this time round. His manner had changed dramatically to match his attire, he seemed almost humane and the tattoo was concealed.

My brush with bailiffs was an unsettling experience, but I think myself luckily as it could have been much worse. The use of bailiffs in the UK by local authorities is absurd, counter productive and unethical. Local authorities have a responsibility to the communities they represent to make every effort to safeguard their wellbeing. It is not ethical to evoke undue stress on residents who are in no position to pay outstanding debts. Simply keeping a roof over one's head and being able to afford your five a day is hard enough for some. In the cases highlighted, it is clear that some bailiffs' conduct is not dissimilar to the behavior of a threatening loan shark. I recognise that we all must in some way contribute financially for services we need and use. However, the use of bailiffs to retrieve outstanding debts from individuals who are not able to afford to repay their original debt, let alone a debt doubled by 'bum bailiff' fees is callous. I find it perverse that local and central government prey on the most vulnerable to retrieve outstanding debts, but override the tax obligations larger corporations have, such as Vodafone. It's as though we live in a feudal system still, where the rich get richer and 'bum bailiffs' fuck the poor. Well, I'd like to see these rich corporations have some one up *their* arses for once, just to balance things out a bit. But forgive me, for I am a dreamer and I thought that in this world we were all equals. My mistake.





MICKY'S LAMBENT CONCERNS STEVE AYLETT

HEY GRANDMA, IT'S DAWNED ON ME I'M A CREEPY FIGURINE. MY STRANGE HEAD I THINK MIGHT BE MADE OF HALF-MELTED WAX.



MORE THAN ANYTHING YOUR HEAD'S LIKE A DOORKNOB. BUT YOU'RE NOT SUGGESTING I'M RESPONSIBLE?



BETWEEN YOU AND MOTHER I'D SOONER I HAD NO HEAD AT ALL. I'M LIKE A BALLOON ANIMAL GONE WILD.

YOU MAY BE MANY THINGS BUT ONE THING YOU ARE NOT IS A BALLOON ANIMAL. YOU SHOULD HAVE TOLD US FROM THE START THAT YOU FELT THIS WAY.



MY FACE DOESN'T WORK, IT'S USELESS.

BUT I LOVE IT. IT'S YELLOW! HA HA HA! I'M PROBABLY AN EVIL DEMON! HA HA HA HA!



WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN TELLING YOUR GRANDMA?



ALL ABOUT MY TERRIBLE HEAD AND TORSO. SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY! I RECKON I'M MAYBE A FLOATY, UNPREDICTABLE PUPPET WITH SNAPPING TEETH!

WHY IF THAT WERE TRUE I'D ALSO BE A DEMONIC MANNIKIN OR FIEND FROM HELL. IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK, MICKY?

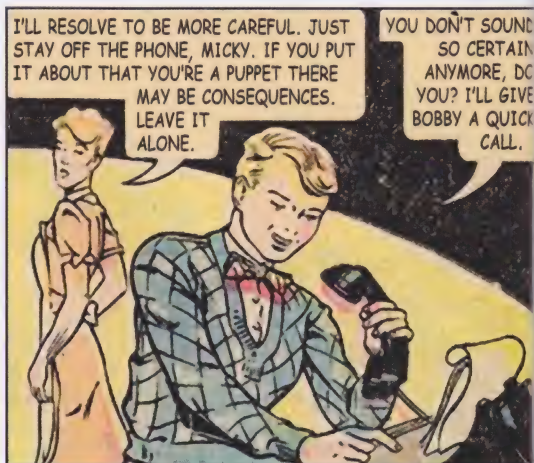


JUST DON'T COME ANY CLOSER.

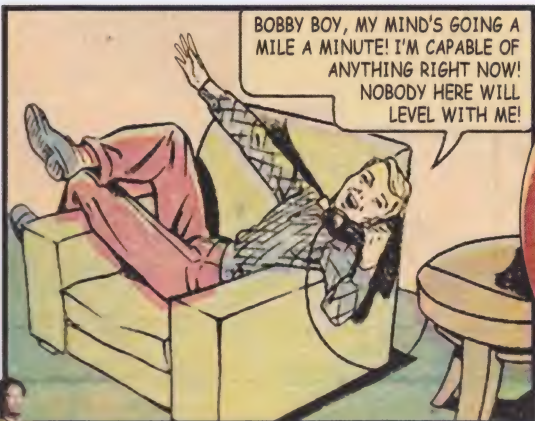
FURTHER BACK. FURTHER. THAT'S OKAY. CHRIST, MOM, YOU KNOW HOW DANGEROUS THESE HIGH-TAR EYEBROWS OF MINE CAN BE. IT'S AS IF YOU WANT THINGS TO GO BADLY.



I'LL RESOLVE TO BE MORE CAREFUL. JUST STAY OFF THE PHONE, MICKY. IF YOU PUT IT ABOUT THAT YOU'RE A PUPPET THERE MAY BE CONSEQUENCES. LEAVE IT ALONE.



YOU DON'T SOUND SO CERTAIN ANYMORE, DO YOU? I'LL GIVE BOBBY A QUICK CALL.



BOBBY BOY, MY MIND'S GOING A MILE A MINUTE! I'M CAPABLE OF ANYTHING RIGHT NOW! NOBODY HERE WILL LEVEL WITH ME!



I'VE BEEN DOING SOME HARD THINKING DEEP IN MY GILLWORKS. I'M A CRUDE WAX EFFIGY, I'M SURE OF IT, POORLY DISGUISED AS A CHILD.



THAT'S ENOUGH, YOU, I KNOW ALL ABOUT IT! AND YOU'VE KNOWN IT FOR A LONG TIME SO DON'T PRETEND YOU DON'T! "DO NOT SUFFER A MONSTER TO LIVE" SAYS THE GOOD BOOK! STAY CLEAR OF ME OR IT'S THE COPS, MICKY, JUST STAY AWAY!



THERE - BOBBY DIDN'T THINK MUCH OF IT, DID HE? YOU'LL BRING OWN THE WRATH OF HONOR ON ALL OUR HEADS, MICKY! DON'T YOU KNOW THEY'LL KILL ANYONE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO ANSWER TO THEIR OWN NAME?



NOT ANY MORE HE'S NOT. VISIT THE LOCAL QUARRY AND MAKE SOME NEW FRIENDS IN THE RUBBLE.

I'D GET MORE ANSWERS OUT OF THE RUBBLE, RIGHT MOM?



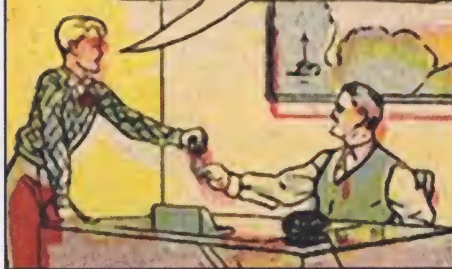
I THINK WE ALL TOOK IT FOR GRANTED THAT YOU WERE HUMAN, UNTIL YOU BEGAN THIS RUNNING BATTLE WITH YOUR OWN FACE. IT'S JUST TOO BAD. AND YOU'RE GENERALLY SO MODEST.



I'M SURE THIS IS ALL SOME EXPENSIVE MISTAKE. WHO ARE YOU CALLING NOW?



HERE'S A PIECE OF CARTILAGE I FOUND IN MY EYE. I THINK ANALYSIS WILL QUICKLY SHOW I'M OUTSIDE THE HUMAN RANGE. BUT DO WE REALLY NEED TO GO THROUGH ALL THAT? YOU KNOW MY ORIGINS, WHY NOT LET IT LOOSE? I'M A BAFFLINGLY SHINY CHAFFINCH MAYBE, ENCLOSED IN A NIMBUS OF LOW-BUDGET REDEMPTION...



...OR A CREATURE BUILT ONLY TO DECEIVE. I NEED ANSWERS, MISTER.



THE LAST ONE'S THE DEFINITION OF A HUMAN. AND I FEEL UNEASY, IT'S TRUE. BUT HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITY THAT YOU REALLY ARE THE SORT OF PERSON YOU SEEM TO BE?



SHREWD, POPS! MEANWHILE, THESE ARE MY OPTIONS - BASED ON ELEVEN FEVER DREAMS, TEN YEARS LIVING ON A REEF OF GOSSIP, THE LOOKS THAT PEOPLE GIVE ME, AND NOTHING YOU'LL BE GLAD TO HEAR.



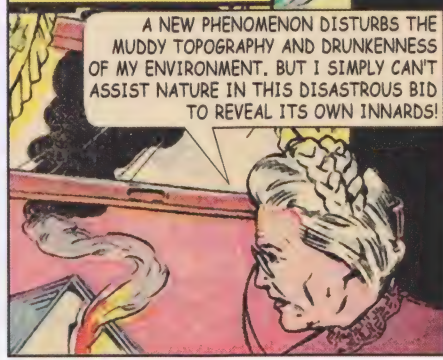
CHECK IT OUT, DADDY-O! THIS IS THE VERY REASON A DELUSION GAINS GROSS DEFINITION OVER TIME! HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!

PUFF-BALL FUNGUS (READY TO BURST?)
TAILOR'S DUMMY (ESCAPED)
EMERGENCY LIFE-FORM
VOODOO DOLLY (SPELL IMPLoded)
SINGLE NERVE BLOWN OUT OF SIZE
CARNIVAL OF FRAGMENTS
CATERPILLAR REARING UP (BEADY EYES)
FLUSHED CAUL RETURNED IN HORROR
PIG GONE TERRIBLY WRONG
SIGN OF THE TIMES
ETIOLOGICAL AMOEBA (FULL OF WATER)
PALE BLIND WORM EXPOSED TO THE SUNLIGHT
REMINDER OF CONSEQUENCE
BLOVIATE EGGSHELL-HEADED DEMON
COSMIC WAXY BUILD-UP
FLEED CHIMP + SLIME MOULD
LOCAL TUBE WITH ARMS & LEGS

FESS UP, POPS - I'M A DEVIL'S EMBELLISHMENT STITCHED WITH SECRETS, RIGHT? BOBBY DENOUNCED MY INTRIGUES WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING AT THEM IN DETAIL. I'M A TODDLING, TWITCHING RUSE, RIGHT? SKINNY TOO. LEGALLY, WHAT CAN BE DONE? WILL I LOSE COHERENCE SOON? DISSOLVE? DOES IT MEAN SOMETHING? A JUDGEMENT UPON US? AM I SOMETHING JUST UNDERCOOKED? OVERCOOKED? OVERRIPE? UNDERRIPE? PACKED WITH POISON? DO I HAVE TO GO AND DO SOMETHING IMPORTANT? WILL I DECAY OTHERWISE? CAN YOU PRESERVE ME? AM I CURSED? DANGEROUS? SHOULD I END IT ALL?

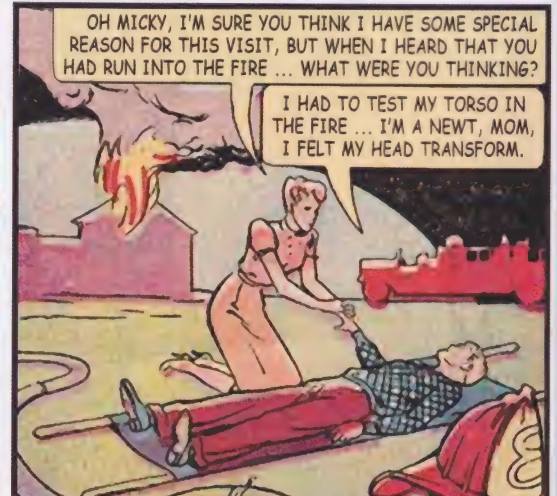
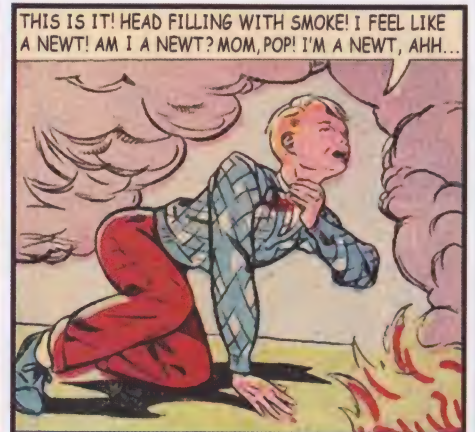
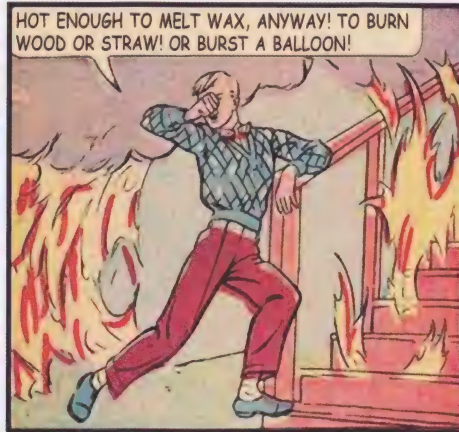
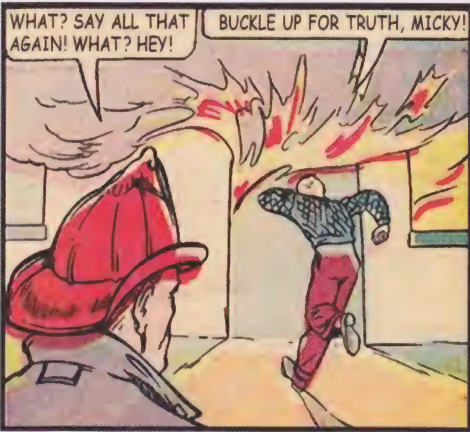


LATER, ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE IN GRANDMA'S NEIGHBORHOOD.



FIRE, MICKY! IT'LL AFFECT US ALL!





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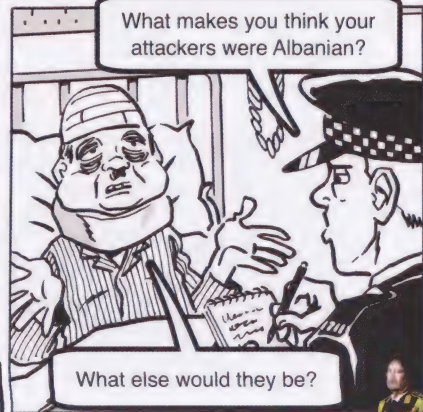
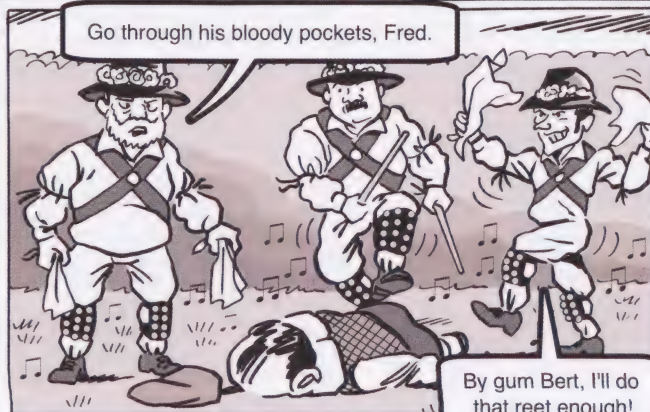
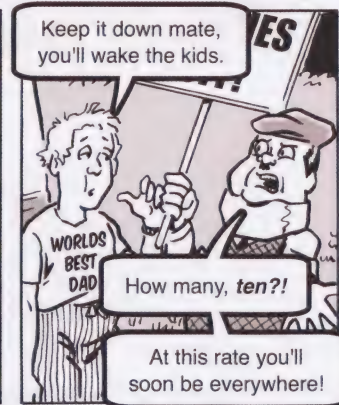
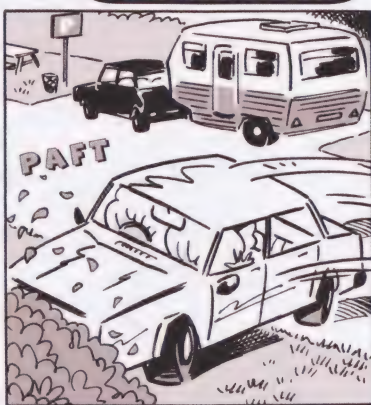
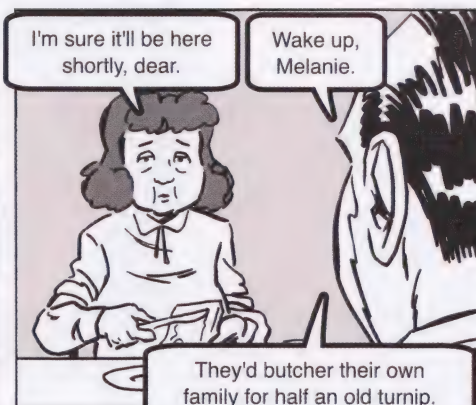
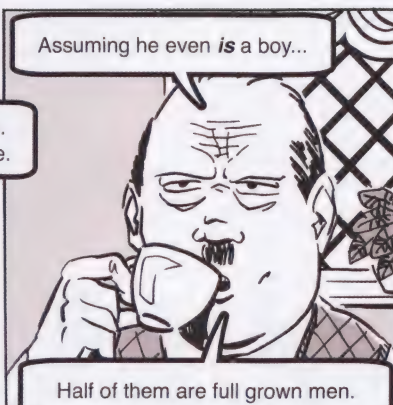
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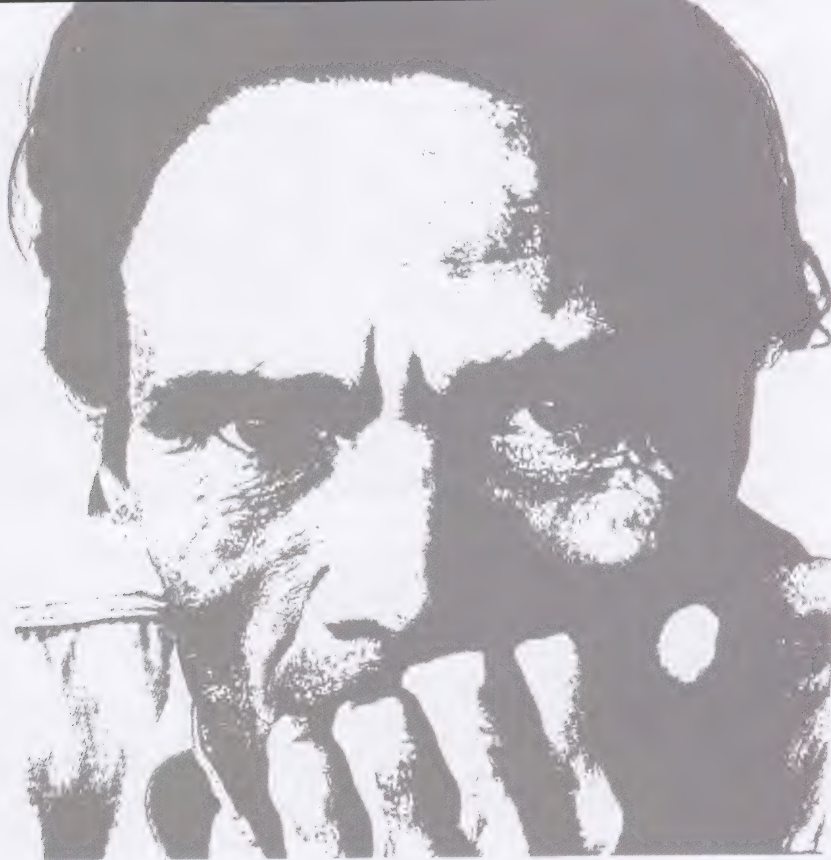
It was late
so we pu

GNN

by Lee Healey

Mal de Mail





PIER PAOLO PASOLINI: SAVAGE MESSIAH

He was out for the night trawling as usual when he met Giuseppe Pelosi, a 17-year-old rent boy down at Termini train station...they went to a pizzeria and then drove to Ostia for a bit of the old in out...within the next 30 minutes Pasoli was dead, run over umpteen times by his own Alfa Romeo Giulietta. Later that night Pelosi was arrested driving the man's Giulietta along the seafront at Ostia and immediately confessed to his murder, saying the man had tried sodomising him with a broom handle...

The man was Pier Paolo Pasolini and he was 53 years old, and one Silvio Berlusconi, the current Italian Prime Minister may be one of the one of the people responsible along with various elements of the far right, the military and of course, "Il Cosa Nostra", better known in dear old blighty as those knockabout tearaways, just regular church-going goodfellas, trying to make a living and feed their families union-bashing and extorting their skint neighbours: the Mafia. This is common knowledge to anybody in Italy with anything between their ears: just like the pseudonymous Windsors, these people have been knocking each other off since before Machiavelli was a twinkle in his daddy's eye, and Shakespeare was scratching his head wondering what the fuckin' backstory to 'Piers Ploughman' was...

The pope's banker Roberto Calvi was murdered in London, some say by the same crowd. His body was found hanging from the steel joists under Blackfriars Bridge. How the fuck they managed that would baffle the Met Police for at least 20 minutes before they decided that he was just some damn mob banker who got what was coming to him. After a lengthy trial, Pelosi was finally found guilty and sentenced to nine years in jail: a lot of fuckin' pasta senza salsa.

Many people were disgruntled with the murder verdict. The actress Laura Betti, who had worked extensively with Pasolini over the years, started a campaign for a public inquiry into the murder...she claimed that the strategic locus of the murder was political; because in the months leading up to the killing he had accused Italy's leading politicians of various indictments such as collusion with the Mafia. In polemics written for leading Italian newspaper 'Corriere Della Sera' he had called for Italy's ruling elite to be put on trial...

Bernardo Bertolucci the film director pointed out the way Pasolini's life and public image had been attacked ad hominem in the weeks leading up to the murder. His last film *Salo*, a vicious satire on Mussolini's fascist state, had shown the extreme right as sodomites and he had been receiving death threats from certain elements still hankering for the good old days of the black shirts. Bertolucci commented that even the attending pathologist, Faustino Durante, hinted that the killing could not have been the work of one man. In 1977 a court concluded that Pasolini had been murdered by Pelosi and persons unknown; but in '79, at Pelosi's appeal, it was decided that he was the sole killer. In 2005 Pelosi, then 46, said in an interview for Italian TV station 'Rai 3': 'I am innocent, I didn't kill him'. Sergio Citti, a lifelong friend and colleague, told a different version - Pelosi was just a wee boy, he said. He acted as bait for three men who did the actual deed; they needed someone to blame for the murder; it was ordered by highly respectable individuals. Pasolini's death was a convenience for a lot of people, to all those afraid of his highly tuned mind and free spirit. In 2005, Italian magistrates reopened the case promising to consider new evidence...a conclusion has yet to be reached. I suppose we'll never find out the truth of what happened on that clammy November night, probably as much chance as we have of finding out who stuck it to bad back Jack Kennedy...

Pasolini was born in Bologna - still a red stronghold - in 1922. He was the son of Carlo Alberto, who was famous for saving Mussolini's life. He was married to a schoolteacher, Susanna Colussi. In 1926, his father was arrested for gambling debts and his mother took the young Pasolini and his young brother Guidalberto to her family's house in Casarsa della Delizia, in the Friuli region.

Pasolini began writing poems at the age of 7. One of his early influences was the work of 'Voleur de Feu', Arthur Rimbaud. In 1939, he entered the Literature College of the University of Bologna, finding his metier through the discovery of new disciplines such as Philology and Aesthetics of Figurative Art. He also became a regular at the local cinema club, where he saw the films of Mario Monicelli, Marcel Carne, Jean Renoir and many others. Pasolini always acted tough in front of his friends, totally hiding his interior struggle over his sexual persona. Like Genet, Pasolini knew he was a homosexual before he knew what a homosexual was.



In 1941, together with friends, he attempted to publish a poetry magazine, but failed due to wartime paper shortages. During this period, Pasolini started to write in the Friulian dialect, which he had learned from his mother. After this failure Pasolini published - at his own expense - a collection of poems in Friulian: 'Versi A Casarsa'. The work was noted by critics, and was very well received. He became chief editor of the magazine 'Il Setaccio' ('The Sieve'). But he was fired after multiple disagreements with the publisher. In the weeks before the September armistice, he was drafted. He was captured and imprisoned by the Germans. He managed to escape and found his way back to Casarsa. Here he joined a group of other young men who wanted to give Casarsa Friulian a status equal to that of Udine, the official dialect of the province. From May '44, they issued a magazine entitled 'Stroligut di ca da l'aga' - I don't know Friulian, so you'll have to find out what the mag's title was yourselves. But Casarsa was badly hit by Allied attacks, and forced enrolments by the Italian Social Republic and the partisans. On the 18th February '45, Pasolini and others founded the Friulian Language Academy ('Academiuta di lenga furlana'). In October '46 he published a small poetry collection, 'I Diarii' ('The Diaries') with the Academiuta. He then upped sticks and travelled to Rome. The following May he began the so-called 'Quaderni Rossi', hand-written in old school jotters with red covers. He also completed a play in Italian, 'Il Cappellano' (The Man In The Hat). His poetry collection, 'I Pianti' ('The Cries'), was also published by the Academiuta.

While openly gay from the very start of his career - thanks to a gay sex scandal that sent him, as I previously mentioned, packing from his home town to live and work in Rome - Pasolini could be quite prudish. For example he opposed amendments to the archaic abortion laws.

Pasolini was a unique talent. His metier straddling the arts of film, poetry, politics and painting, but it's the films that really turned me on to him. His films explore the dark side of the human psyche like nothing else I've ever come across in all my years as a film enthusiast. He had a way of exposing human depravity under late capitalism that has had a direct influence on a vast array of filmmakers from Takeshi Miike to Quentin Tarantino, Francois Ozon and countless others ... His first film 'Accattone', based on his second novel 'A Violent Life' set in the slums - 'burgati' - on the outskirts of Rome, caused a terrible furore, even garnering condemnation from the cat in the Vatican in the pointy hat.

Accattone and his pals sit around scheming and pimping their girlfriends, grassing each other and in one scene he and a pal contrive to steal the food from their starving friend's mouths. The movie ends with him being accidentally killed by a car while running away from the cozzers after getting caught with two of his muckers stealing two quid's worth of salami. As he lies in the street dying his handcuffed pals ask him, 'You OK?' - His last words are: 'moult bene' - never better in Italian. The film caused a storm of protest from all elements of the Italian establishment. Instead of recruiting real actors, he enlisted the young people who lived and worked in the burgati of Rome. Without any money or other resources Pasolini created a masterpiece. And some of the people who worked on the film went on to achieve worldwide success even, notably, Franco Citti, who played the role of the protagonist, and assistant director Bernardo Bertolucci...

As a director, Pasolini created a picaresque neo-realism; portraying a sometimes brutal reality which many did not want to see in 'a work of art'. His films, with their poetry of brutality, showed ordinary Italians that such brutality existed right next door, and created a major contribution to change in the Italian psyche. Pasolini espoused in his works the idea of 'natural sacredness' - the notion that the world in which we live is in and of itself holy - this is long before Paul Schrader's ground-breaking text, 'Transcendental Style In Film'. He suggested there was no such thing as a god or need for any kind of supernatural or spiritual essence to attain a state of holiness - Pasolini was an atheist. He once remarked in an interview that the bible was one of the many books of religious propaganda that would eventually become linguistically incomprehensible to humanity. Texts tied to their time and historic place, and he felt the church could only survive by putting into constant crisis its institutionality. We can only

bring into question not the validity of the church, but its mere motive of existence. As far as he was concerned the church was just another part of the controlling apparatus of the power structure of capitalism. He once said that one should never hope for anything - hope is a thing invented by the power structure to keep the poor happy, or to offer emotional solace to those in need of it ...

In 1964, Pasolini created his masterpiece - 'Il Vangelo secondo Matteo' - 'The Gospel According To Matthew' - still considered the finest cinematic portrayal of the life of Christ. Despite the church's previous disapproval of his work - he had spent four months in jail after they brought obscenity charges against him (one of over 40 he fought during his career) for his satire, 'La Ricotta' - he received the approval of the Catholic church and picked up the International Catholic Film Office's Film Award. Christ is played beautifully by non-actor, Spanish student Enrique Irazoqui. During the making of the film Pasolini said he wanted to direct it from the point of view of the religious believer. Later though, after viewing the final cut, he said he had only committed his own beliefs to the screen. Made, again, with a cast of nonactors, and his key collaborators - Tonino Delli Colli (photography), Carlo Fini (costumes), Nino Baragli (editor) and producer Alberto Grimaldi - and shot in the poor southern town of Matera amongst "The Sassi" - the ancient cave-like dwellings that epitomised the north-south divide in Italy - it's a picture of Christ as a Guevara-like firebrand that is still one of the most moving experiences a person can have in two and a half hours...

Using a soundtrack that includes Blind Willie Johnson, Bach and Carl Orff, its power to move you hasn't faded with time; and any atheist would dig this picture that dug film. Pasolini became a world-renowned master after the release of this film and he was able to find the financing to realise more ambitious projects featuring movie stars, such as Terence Stamp, Pierre Clementi and Silvana Magnano - he said he didn't want them for their star quality but for their personages. Terence Stamp in 'Theorem' (1968), was said to have felt he had been used wrongly by Pasolini since he never gave him motivation and the rest of it. And Anna Magnani - grand duchess of Italian neo-realism - was said to have felt the same way in his second film - 'Mamma Roma' (1962). "They felt as though I was stealing from them, stealing their reality," he commented ...

The late 60s was the time of the student protests, and Pasolini's position was ambiguous to say the least. He agreed with the students' position ideologically, but found them anthropologically middle class and therefore doomed to failure in their attempt at revolutionary change. Regarding the battle of 'Valle Giulia', which took place in Rome in March 1968, he said that he sympathised with the police, as they were the children of the poor; while the young radicals were the exponents of left-wing fascism, the policemen, sons of proletarian southerners, were beaten up by arrogant daddy's boys. This condemning statement, however, did not stop him from contributing to the autonomist 'Lotta Continua' movement ('The Struggle Continues'), the forebear of the contemporary 'potere operaio' (workers' power)...

The 60s were also a period of intense, highly energised activity for Pasolini in the arts. After "The Gospel..." Pasolini made Uccelacci e Uccellini (Bad Birds and Little Birds, 1965; English title - "Hawks and Sparrows") an allegorical modern-day Marxist fable with the renowned Italian comedian Toto - the first movie (and the only one I know of) to have the opening credits sung in Roman plainsong. The film follows Toto and the aforementioned Davoli, firstly around the slum, where he has given the streets hokey names like "Poverty Crescent" and "Working Class Street" and then into the countryside outside the city, where they meet a talking crow who tries, through the telling of fables, to instruct the pair in the good common sense and rationale of dialectical materialism. They sit listening and agreeing, then disagreeing, and then finally they kill the rabbiting bird, cook it and eat it. Toto gives the performance of his life and shows what a great dramatic actor he was as well as being a great vaudevillian and Davoli. "That thieving Calabrian street hoodlum", as he was once called by Fellini, plays the vessel through which Pasolini conveys his contempt for the values of the young people of the time with



their aspirations to the high life, as portrayed so beautifully the next year by Fellini in "La Dolce Vita", the movie that gave birth to the term paparazzi - "annoying flies". Ever the conflicted gay catholic Marxist - he was expelled from the P.C.I. (Italian Communist Party) in 1947 after an affair with one of his pupils at the school he taught at in Casarsa - Pasolini was still touting the old party rhetoric, even if inadvertently so. While in TV and the newspapers he was always extremely critical of them - "Marxism being rational is true when it's a science but the moment Marxism goes into action it ceases to be rational. Purely pragmatic elements or purely revolutionary sentiments contain something of a mystical or religious nature," he remarked at the time of the film's release.

Hawks and Sparrows was followed by "Theorem" in 1968, featuring Terence Stamp as a mysterious stranger who seduces the members of a rich factory-owner's family, exposing their civilised exteriors as sheer facade as they one by one fall into dissolution and finally insanity and nymphomania. The closing scene of the film sees the family patriarch - played by Massimo Girotti - running naked and deranged along a bleak Beckettian lunar landscape after having handed over ownership of the factory to its workers; fuckin' stunning! It still blows me away every time I see it...

In 1970, Pasolini bought a castle in Viterbo just outside Rome and began working on what was to be his magnum opus "Petrolio", a novel about his lifelong preoccupation with power and who wields it and how. It tells the story of Carlo, a man who walks the corridors of power by day in his capacity as an executive of the Italian state oil company E.N.I., and by night he stalks the dirty side of Rome in search of dangerous sexual encounters with the rent boys and ratbags whom he casually comes across, having sex with 20 of them at one point in the story. He also during this time filmed what has become known as "The Life Trilogy" - adaptations of some of the great works of world literature - Boccaccio's "Decameron" (1970), Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" (1971) and "I Fiore de Una e Mille note" (Arabian Nights, 1973). All caused great scandal and furore in practically every country they were released in and in Italy he was brought up on the old obscenity charges again. The British Board Of Film Censors allowed a butcher to fuck-cut "The Canterbury Tales" to be shown here and even with the drastic cuts they ordered it's still a great, bustling bawdy thing - especially the part telling "The Miller's Tale" featuring a romping filthy performance from the late, grand and groovy Welsh actor Hugh Griffiths...

In 1975 Pasolini started work on his final film 'Salo', an adaptation of The Marquis De Sade's '120 Days of Sodom' set in Mussolini's crumbling Italian Social Republic. In 2005 it was voted by the critics in the Time Out Film guide as the most controversial film of all time. It was financed partly by Hollywood, although after seeing it Warner Bros boss John Calley ordered the negative burned. It's even been suggested that he contrived to put some of the rolls of the film into the hands of the mob. The film is extremely hard to watch as Pasolini piles depravity upon depravity, coprophagia, sodomy and the scalping of naked teens being some of the moments that offer a little light relief compared to some of the other things shown in this mind-blowing film. Pasolini's savage indictment of Fascism and its mindless brutality is maybe what became the deciding factor for the cabal that killed him to go ahead with the heinous deed but, as I've already said, he had made a lot of powerful enemies over the years, and to me it seems inevitable that "The Pasolini Problem" was always destined to be resolved the only way these people know how to shut someone up who is constantly showing them up for the ordure they truly are: by killing them...

35 years after his death, we have seen the return of Fascism under the leadership of Berlusconi and, no doubt about it, Pasolini would have despaired at the fate of the left were he still alive. Their ham-fisted attempts at reconciliation when in government, brokering a deal with Berlusconi, allowed the media mogul's "conflicts of interest" to go unchallenged. He would have agreed with film-maker Nanni Moretti for denouncing the country's leaders and attempting to build a broad citizen's movement to challenge the current leadership in government, and Berlusconi's monopolies.

Pier Paolo Pasolini was a man of many contradictions, free of dogmas, his constant search for the truth of things in his work and politics shaped his whole life. He once said that it is not until someone is dead that you can really start finding out who they were.

Reverend D.W Love (Jake Black)



PIER PAOLO PASOLINI: SAVAGE MESSIAH





GIVING UP THE GHOST

by Gary Mills



Pop is dead, but unending mainstream revivals suggest a gravedigger is required. Hauntology – the fortysomething's hobbyhorse – is not up to the job.

1: Conditions

The diminishing returns of regurgitated popular memes have provided something of a signature characteristic of the cultural landscape in which I've grown up. A friend of mine once quite smartly referred to the 1990s as pop culture's index times, a suggestion that innovation was grinding down under the weight of its own history, a postmodernist epilogue of cross-referencing where styles or sounds of any kind were admissible. Parallel appreciations of punk, hip-hop, electronica, mod and folk had become the norm, nothing seemed out of fashion as such. It was a deluge of education, and anything could be exhumed. When, some years later, you find pop's razed panorama stalked by the same old ghosts, it's not quite such a joy.

Finding fairly indisputable evidence that pop in all its forms is in a state of degeneration is not exactly hard. It's become eerily routine for TV producers to reset a given programme format to another decade, to let researchers off the leash and into the flea markets and thrift shops for retro upholstery, kitsch clothing and faded ornamentals. The door to the archive is permanently ajar to those bleached old clips reminding us how we used to live and what we used to watch, triggers for memories which once felt lost entirely and probably never belonged to us anyway.

The rock 'n roll establishment meanwhile enjoys a permanent tribute gig jam in its honour through the dialysis of ad nauseam reappraisals and repackaged classics. They were *all* great lost albums. It was all pivotal and influential. An inspired reworking of the hits is lined up with Jools Holland and a gospel choir on BBC2, then they'll be covered in a themed edition of *The X Factor* the following week. Everything will be just fine. After all, this age of insatiable duplication has just seen The Beatles – the one band whose entire oeuvre has already been consumed, pored over, burned, bootlegged, ripped and played backwards by every contiguous living system on the planet – register 2 million track downloads in the week of their 'official' iTunes launch, 40 years after breaking up. It can't fail. It's risk-free.

The fact is that mainstream pop is so lacking in schism, so conspicuously devoid of that violent rift which once marked one generation's baton change to the next, that the ruling order's mass fluoridation programme presides unchallenged. The sacred cattle that so breezily crap out their remastered back catalogue time and again are grazing on land that should have long been re-occupied, seized by those with a point to prove or at least a new way of dismaying, abusing or offending the moderate view, the acquiescent median.

But whilst you can't simply engineer the attitude, the hunger or the scene-shifting artisanal nous that those hoary old tortoises once oozed, somewhere along the line we decided to try. You might exclaim that these were at least attributes that couldn't be taught in school, but of course, it is one of the great unmitigated horrors of the ebbing popular frontier that just such an institution actually exists.

The BRIT Awards-funded London School for Performing Arts & Technology has been farming out stars like battery chickens for some years, stage-reared jazz-handed pros whose anodyne smashes have appeared to act as a pesticide to originality. The populace insatiably gorges on their reformed monstrosity-pop and in its stupor hails vacuum-formed mimicry as authentic quality. Let's face it, the 1960s was so much fun that we may as well pretend it never ended; we can all don pork-pie hats, Quant dresses, skinny suits and loafers and binge on the idiom together. Not only are these new figurine rockers so well trained that they don't even need the desperation or the ideas to succeed, they're well mannered enough to duet with the old guard rather than launch phlegm at them. God bless the harmony.

Indeed, 'well mannered' is such an all-powerful epithet of the new age, that what used to constitute anything more volatile – an *alternative music* – has been propelled off the radar altogether. The finely crafted, family-friendly affectations typical of this achingly rehearsed wave of derivation have so monopolised the medium that any artist even mildly revolted by posture-over-production has fled so far leftfield that the mainstream barely knows they exist. The online netherworld of uploads, downloads and networks various has accommodated them, with the transfer of a long-expired traditional rock press to blogs and virtual magazines ensuring that the most eminent music writers have joined in too. And it seems they wouldn't have had it any other way.

2: Concept

Imagine, if you can, a time when popular society looked to the future, when a term such as 'mod' sat a little more accurately with the extension 'modernism', that is to say, newness, the cutting edge, and not a flimsy retreat of fashions enjoyed by your grandparents. Then look beyond the nascent rock scene, and consider the concurrent forward thinking stance of artists, architects, novelists, the broadcast media and filmmakers. I know, we're partially back in the 1960s again, an obvious irony and one that we'll return to. But the outlook of evolution, progressive socialism, healthy flux and fantasy – substance *and* style – is, in 2011, something to be haunted by. No surprise then that a generation of music makers whose retrofuturist lament found its way, knowingly or otherwise, onto a diversely revenant burst of releases, might be bracketed into a new subgenre.



It's about now that I should reveal my own relationship with what is known as hauntology, an explanation born in part out of the scene's failure to upset the mainstream depression. By 2006 I had worked steadily on numerous oddball releases – audio and otherwise – as a collaborator with my friend, Ian Hicks aka Baron Mordant (who, for those unsure, shares no kinship with a similarly titled nobleman who straddled land around the River Ouse in the 14th century). As Mordant Music, we'd just completed the *Dead Air* album, a conceptual yet still wilfully incoherent opus, long in gestation and sample-heavy. The project's vista of influence spanned many points of reference, including nuclear paranoia, antiquated broadcast mores and an apparently re-emergent culture of warnings. Whilst this lent the piece an obviously nostalgic hue (the Thames continuity announcer Philip Elsmore – a faintly remembered TV ghost from our respective childhoods – contributed a clipped original narrative), we were keen to fix the rudder on a fresh course. The quotient of ripped audio provided more than enough recognition value, and the perils of pastiche and parody would have flown in the face of our steadfast pursuit of a yield that erred consistently on a confounding tilt. The Baron's way with the waveform ensured that the MM stamp would only ever signal uniqueness and not caricature anyway, and we endeavoured to shape our own path, unaware of any empathetic spiritual activity elsewhere.

So it was with some surprise that Mordant were subsequently diagnosed, along with Ghost Box and Trunk Records, as hosting a "growing strain of underground haunted audio" by the music critic Simon Reynolds. In his article for the November 2006 issue of *The Wire* magazine, 'Society of the Spectral', he drew these distant relations together by virtue of unconsciously shared experiences, a generational radar under which an affinity of UK-based cultural data had invoked some uncanny yet disparate results. Though Reynolds reluctantly applied the term 'hauntology', suggesting, perhaps more suitably, an altogether anonymous marker for the artists in this broadest of churches, it stuck.

This co-opting of a label originally coined by the philosopher Jacques Derrida to accompany his theory of mapping Western ideological spectrality seemed, on the surface, to sit quite well with the disquietude of those mining the new sonic trend. The common ground here was defined broadly on the one hand as a post-war, pre-Thatcher framing of inspiration, further characterised by a sharp eye for key fragments of associated popular tradition, whose hoarding would shape the surface of the resulting product. Informing this approach on an intellectual level was a particular sense of loss – what David Toop termed as "nostalgia for the future", and a "wistful harking back" as Reynolds put it, "to the optimistic, benignly bureaucratic Britain of new towns, garden cities and polytechnics".

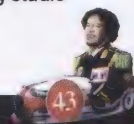
If this seems a touch involved, a little hard to pin down, well, it's kind of appropriate: the image of hauntology at large is of something that's maybe too sprawling and complex – too open to interpretation – to properly delineate. We may be dealing with a fairly experimental strand of sound artists here, but ostensibly, they are still *pop* artists. Let's leave the conjecture and turn our attention then to the popular influences behind those accredited with the hauntological tag, the references that might lend accessibility to the philosophy.

It may seem perverse given the studious, academic gait attributed to its core practitioners, but there is a pulp/trash culture aspect in evidence, notably through a fondness for the UK Hammer, Amicus and Tigon horror stables: this is high-end geekery after all. Trunk Records occasionally sift this visually quite throwaway realm to unearth and reissue cult film soundtrack works, along with sundry score material from the contemporaneous sexploitation genre. The most applicable popular touchstones stem however from the synchronous pasts of science fiction, television, and a far wider dissemination of educational media than we're familiar with today.

3: Input

Ghost Box have, mainly through the graphic skill of sleeve artist Julian House (who also releases under the alias of The Focus Group for the label, which he co-owns with Jim Jupp, aka Belbury Poly), attempted to channel as many of these stock threads as possible, and as such are probably seen as the fulcrum of the hauntological style. House's designs are seemingly composed according to his own version of the 'Marber grid' layout system, conceived originally by the Polish designer Romek Marber for the Penguin Crime series of paperbacks and extended through the publisher's Pelican imprint of socially cultivating texts. Collage insets evoke pagan spells, classroom daydreams and all manner of pastoral oddities, an image bank echoed in the exquisitely rendered film sequences House has produced to supplement the label identity.

These acutely observed 'logotone' reels relate well with the use of obsolete TV continuity and voiceover material, a barely visible font of which has been plundered both by Mordant and The Advisory Circle (the Ghost Box-dwelling project of electronic musician Jon Brooks). A weird, dusty humility lives on in the disembodied enunciations of narrators like Michael Jayston and Keith Barron, especially so with announcers such as Elsmore and David Allan. The archaic tone and tempo of these latter continuity men maintained a vital role in the linking of viewer to medium, an inclusiveness with both the glamorous output and hardware that disappeared from view with the breakup of the independent regional network. The announcer's eye contact became an in-vision buffer to the abnormality of transmission faults and breakdowns, a human face on derailing studio technology.





Literature too has bridged a path onto the hauntological reference map, chiefly by means of a renewal of interest in the Arcadian ghost story and the continued relevance of British sci-fi. The antiquarian chillers of MR James and a partial absorption of Ballard's portentous man-made doom have proved crossover highpoints for the overall aesthetic, but the writer at the core of hauntology's dramatic apex has to be Nigel Kneale. Through Kneale, it is possible for this misted campaign to divine its meditation on TV and tape most readily, with arguably the scene's most pertinent cultural forerunner, the 1972 television play *The Stone Tape*. In this finely tuned, claustrophobic modern horror, scientists discover that the stone walls of their Victorian research facility have recorded the terrible events that took place there many years previously. And these are narrative conditions tailor made for the sonic accessorizing of Desmond Briscoe and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, possibly hauntology's most routinely posited musical precursors.

This team of lab-dwelling splicers fashioned their legacy through a meshing of found sounds and cutting edge synthetics, and the creation of looped, sometimes intensely unsettling sound effects. Via countless soundtracks and incidental electronic flourishes for both TV and radio, audiences of all ages were exposed to an unearthly brand of wildly experimental musique concrete over a 40-year lifespan. Their contributions to a diverse range of programming provided the audio backdrop for hauntology's spiritual dowsing decades later, whilst a select few Radiophonic composers have recently had numerous hitherto unheralded works revived and compiled – by Trunk and others – into a burgeoning canon of individually assigned releases.

But just as one-time Northampton resident Delia Derbyshire – the most revered of the Workshop alumni – moved into more deliberately psychedelic territory under the White Noise moniker, another noted hauntological antecedent was about to begin an extended agitation in the same field. Brian Eno, popular exemplar of the scientific approach to the medium and the shrewd, unerring craftsman behind the *Music For Films* series of albums, would register the sleeve credit of 'tapes' with Roxy Music and pioneer ambient composition over another set of critically elevated releases. In the sleeve notes for the last of these, 1982's *Ambient 4: On Land*, Eno muses on the evocative trappings of both a physical and mental sense of place:

"One of the inspirations for this record was Fellini's 'Amarcord' ('I Remember'), a presumably unfaithful reconstruction of childhood memories....we feel affinities not only with the past, but also with the futures that didn't materialise, and with the other variations of the present that we suspect run parallel to the one we have agreed to live in."

This suggestion of a particular headspace for music making points the way to everything that hauntology could – or perhaps should – represent: a wildly subjective sensory speculation,

possibly unrelated to sound in the first instance, and unfettered by mere nostalgia. With both this quote, and through Eno's apparently terminal decline as multi-media oracle and predominant in the present day, hauntology's problems loom into view.

4: Output

The imagery of mystique and ambiguity presents a neat default for anyone plying their trade in the creative media. For hauntology however, obscurity is seemingly everything. The language of reference is drenched with the indistinct, the unexplained, while Ghost Box in particular may be conspicuous in their distillation of an overtly popular vernacular into something quite devoutly avant garde. And it's on record that this depiction of hauntology ultimately fails.

What Eno appears to have finally proved in recent times is just what an incredible composer he was 30-odd years ago, and that great experimental, non-linear music can't simply be made by firing up a synth and walking away. In a fiercely acerbic review in *The Wire*'s pages of his latest album, *Small Craft On A Milk Sea*, Ian Penman struggles to take seriously a release that is "entirely without interest" and in contrast identifies his prior brilliance. Mourning his once delicately balanced skill in "seeding sublime treats inside long (apparently) arid stretches", Penman highlights how, on those key ambient albums, Eno could lull the listener into wide open, repetitive spaces of drone and tone, "until something weird begins to happen at the edges of perception, a logic of the valuable peripheries rather than the over-valued centre".

To Penman it seems Eno has finally made a complete irrelevance of a once intentionally unobtrusive style. None of the recognised protagonists of hauntology can really be pigeonholed as ambient artists, though you have to wonder why so much of their recorded product sounds as correspondingly pointless as that of the flagging Eno. The obvious mainlined imitation meanwhile makes a mockery of any theoretical justification. What is left to invest in, if you simply don't buy into the atmosphere of allusion?

Nor does hauntology even begin to address a reachable pop format. This is resolutely not a chart-bothering enterprise, unless of course you count the baffling sex-pest drivel of Wisbey's 2007 single, *The Ladies' Bras*, a no 27 smash for Trunk Records. Probably non-canon in fairness, though how such goofing sits with the detached sourness of the Ghost Box mien is anyone's guess. This perfectly tailored imprint by contrast seems far too rapt with faux Radiophonics, cheap deferential theme workouts and the vicarious perpetuation of a musty inscrutability to ever remotely back up Julian House's design class with an equality of content. Hauntology is in part defined by the label's obstinacy, an exasperation born not merely of their inclination to sidestep any condescension to accessibility (an approach hardly embraced by stylistic forebears like Pulp, Blur, St Etienne or even Stereolab),

but the ambition that might deliver the kind of undeniable genre-defining lustre displayed by Boards of Canada on their 1998 *Music Has the Right to Children* album. Here was a release that proved you *could* fuse field recordings, documentary film audio, warped analog synth and gnostic incantations into a great, original piece of work.

You can really *want* to like this stuff; it might feel personal, the weight, the imputed significance of everything that's gone into the hauntological soup, and how and why it's come about. What I personally find it hard to muster any appetite for however is another independent UK label attempting to emulate the idiosyncratic graphic clout established by Factory and 4AD without first signing a corresponding roster of audible talent. Ghost Box are more Mo Wax than Skam: you buy the records and put them on your wall, but you hardly ever listen to them.

The Advisory Circle's excellent *Other Channels* album represents a clear digression into palpable musical aptitude, with accomplished, even soaring titles like *Mogadon Coffee Morning* appearing like veritable expeditions out of the fogged mess that hauntology has managed to contrive for itself: a suggestion that this muted scene could transcend the magnitude of influence, might be able to thrive on its own merits and not disappear beneath the mire of nostalgia into which its flag was pitched. But where *would* Ghost Box be without the pop cult baggage, and more pointedly, without the justly lauded embellishments of Julian House? His choice of target when criticising the "Beck-style empty check-my-reference" tendencies of certain revisionists back in the Reynolds Wire piece suggests a surprising level of misjudgement. Strip away the sometimes unwieldy level of knowing affectation favoured by Beck, and indeed, what are you left with? Reckon without the *Westworld*-tinged reveries that have glided in and out of Ghost Box's future-in-the-past territory to widespread acclaim for nearly two decades, and there remains a compositional dexterity, an incision and intuition that no level of reliance on construct will completely eclipse.

But House is essentially right: those who just ride their luck can't hide forever either. How do The Focus Group or Belbury Poly hold up under comparable scrutiny? Even if Eno simply 'got away with it' for years, the incumbent oneric code can't subsist on his second-hand oscillations alone, thriving as it does on a far more worthwhile period for comment and critique than actual music.

5: Discourse

That initial triumvirate branding by Simon Reynolds in 2006 was underlined for Mordant by its accidental nature, and it's since been an enlightening trip, plotting the origins of hauntology's roots, imagining ever more what it could have become. The architecture critic Owen Hatherley upholds the modernist tenet from behind bush-hammered ramparts, resurfacing the weather-stained reputation of the new

town utopia and re-threading the status of brutalism and social housing as through-roads to the pop of the Independent Group. In attacking what he has called the "austerity nostalgia" of re-imagined modernist imagery (the 'Keep Calm And Carry On' tea towel fad), Hatherley exposes the commodification of socialism into meaningless clutter. Meanwhile Robin Carmody, a music and political commentator of the rarest conviction, rails against the elite's commandeering of pop with a visceral precision noticeably lacking in recorded hauntology.

In a review for The Quietus of the Trunk Records/BBC Life On Earth soundtrack release from 2009, Taylor Parkes praises the paternalistic inclusivity of the broadcast climate that gave us the series. The finest product of this halcyon push for betterment he describes as "truly empowering...its passing has screwed us all to some extent". Elsewhere he's keener to remorselessly deride hauntology's clichéd backdrop, filling an online forum post with mock track titles: "*Swimming Pool Crisp Vending Machine With Old Fashioned Typeface... Completely Flattened Cresta Can With The Colour Sunbleached Out Of It Lying On Hot Tarmac In Picnic Area Of Historic Battle Site*".

Perpetuating this hackneyed symbolism is Found Objects, a virtual repository set up by the blogger and academic Mark Fisher (alias K-Punk). It's a perplexing move. Fisher grasped *Dead Air's* corroded berth better than most, its impetus forged by the atrophied medium and the establishing of "decay and deliquescence as productive processes...as if the mould growing on the archives is the creative force".

To be fair, the House-designed Found Objects banner does include the words 'dumping ground' in its subtitle, which is just as well. This Proustian landfill seems to have re-defined hauntology as one long Panini sticker-bartering session, a dull men-and-their-sheds attenuation towards the full set of Robert Opie scrapbooks, flicked through at leisure as middle age snugly sets in. Occasionally, an examination of a great lost album or scans like the 1956 *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition catalogue punctuate an otherwise vapid deluge of postings and some breathlessly banal polls, conducted to decide on "the most hauntological county" or "the most hauntological decade". But in the main, Found Objects serves to ruin the tactile delight of junk shop trawling, of discovery, with each contributor falling over the other to simply parade his or her used tat, often minus an adequate explanation as to why they think it's in any way representative of a lost future. Photographs of obsolete ice-lolly wrappers or a screen grab of Dave from *Minder* aren't hauntological. They're just *old things*.

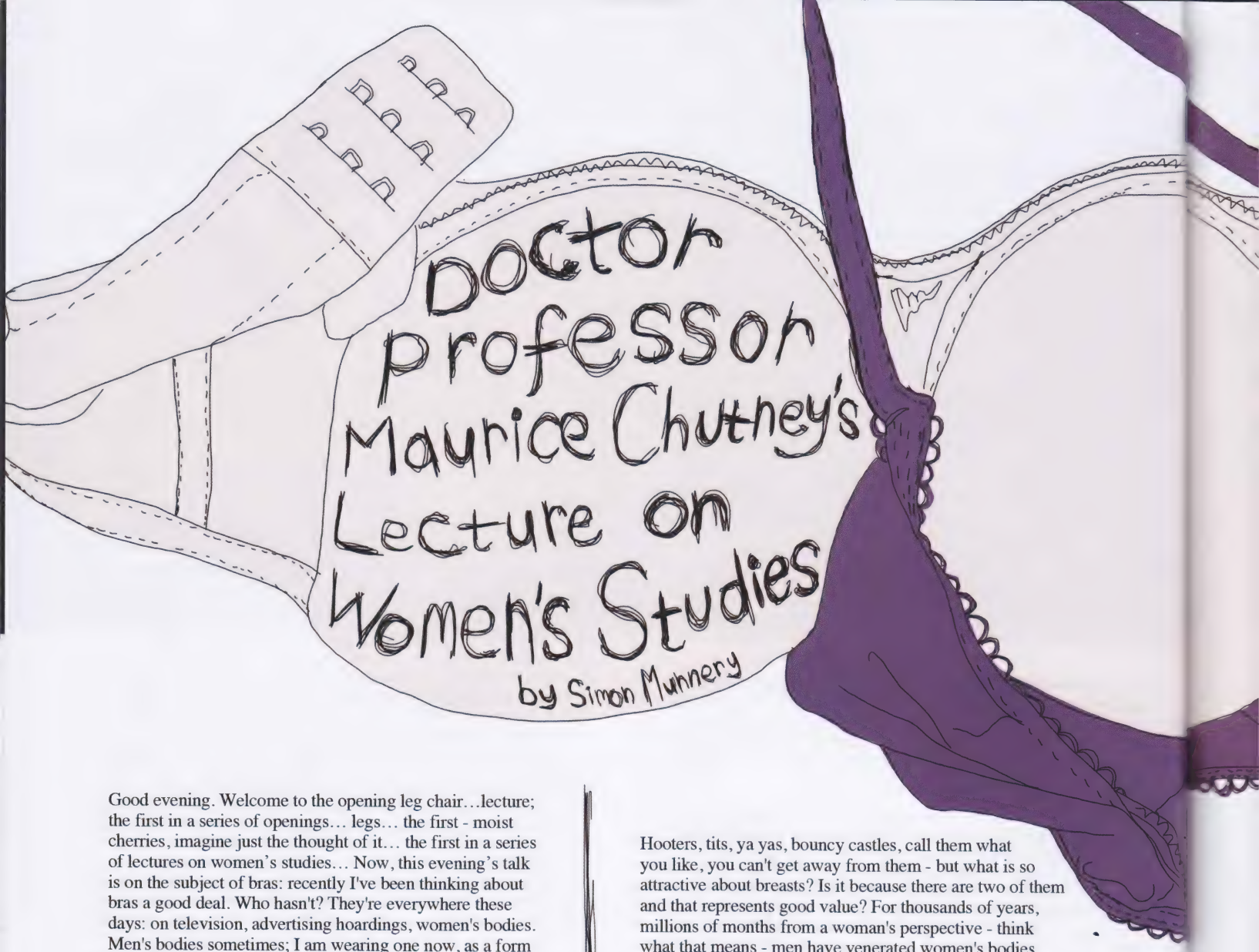
The apparent lack of moderation makes you wonder if Fisher is mildly aghast at what he's unleashed. Simon Reynolds on the other hand is clearly taking the piss when he arrives to bemoan the disappearance of the comb over from the head of the UK male in recent years. But let's not kid ourselves, this is a comfy fortysomething's meeting place, not a refuge for anyone with Carmody's fury, or those truly sickened to the point of civil unrest by what pop has become. The denizens of Found Objects will happily continue the pleasant retro piety: they could - and I've no doubt they'd appreciate the spectral expression - make friends in an empty room.

The real indictment here is the concentration on hauntology's accepted cache, and a lack of focus on the more robust manifestations of haunted audio or those stigmatised by the association. Incongruent Found Objects postings such as the refried electro excerpt from VHS Head's *Trademark Ribbons of Gold* album (sample track title: *Movies That Never Were*) suggests a new dawning of re-imagination altogether. Teasers for Mordant's BFI-commissioned *Misinformation* DVD meanwhile drag the trite mainspring of the public information film into an alternative world by means of some brand new, mutated scores. This is an altogether braver adjustment to pop's newly warped protocol, a refusal to patronise any reverential whimsy.

Whilst Ghost Box may have, in Reynolds's words, attempted to "turn the past into a foreign country", you have to wait for something to happen on one of their releases to determine any success. The conventional serves us nostalgic pap, and by way of what you thought might constitute a response, hauntology simply offers more of the same: the 1960s. Revivalism.

It's not the tiresome backward-looking reiteration of hauntology that substantiates the 'end times' theory per se, but the creeping fear that inspiration has utterly and irrefutably flatlined. Flaunt your bygone cultural detritus on a blog if you must. Make public your sonic frippery by all means. Just remember that no amount of intellectualising will make it artistically viable to do so.





Doctor professor Maurice Chutney's Lecture on Women's Studies

by Simon Munnery

Good evening. Welcome to the opening leg chair...lecture; the first in a series of openings... legs... the first - moist cherries, imagine just the thought of it... the first in a series of lectures on women's studies... Now, this evening's talk is on the subject of bras: recently I've been thinking about bras a good deal. Who hasn't? They're everywhere these days: on television, advertising hoardings, women's bodies. Men's bodies sometimes; I am wearing one now, as a form of research. And I am a man. Oh yes - and determined to remain one, despite the provocation.

Bras intrigue me, they delight me, but most of all they puzzle me. How do you get them off? How do you get them on? Why wear one in the first place? And what's going on with lace? Eh? It's just material with holes in it; less cloth for more money. Harmless enough, some might say, but that money could have been used for hospitals. And what pray will be the evolutionary impact of the bra in the long term? Has the bra enabled larger-breasted women who would naturally have died out - by toppling or ostracisation - to live longer and have more sex, hence more offspring, thereby raising the average breast size of the population? Or is the recorded rise in average breast volume simply a result of the fundamental law of supply and demand? After all, nature abhors a vacuum. And so do I. But I also abhor nature, so I abhor two things to nature's one, and thus I win. For now at least - in the fullness of time it may turn out that nature also abhors me, evening the score - but should that happen at least I'll have been noticed by nature and that'll be nice.

But is the recorded lift in mean bosom circumference something to be welcomed - or fought against tooth and nail? Surely - and research may well back this up - some relation must exist between mammary capacity and, for example, intelligence. Perhaps an inverse relationship: the same nutrients can't go to two parts of the body. When they look back at us will they say: "Twas as if they willed their own demise."

Hooters, tits, ya yas, bouncy castles, call them what you like, you can't get away from them - but what is so attractive about breasts? Is it because there are two of them and that represents good value? For thousands of years, millions of months from a woman's perspective - think what that means - men have venerated women's bodies. We put them on pedestals. Why? Was it so we could look up their skirts? Does pornography degrade women? Or does it merely raise the standard by which they are judged? And who shot J.R.? A woman, no doubt, but that is unusual. Generally - and I use the word advisedly, perhaps ill-advisedly, time will tell - it is men that do all the murder and commit all the crime. Yes yes yes; but who gave birth to the swine? Who raised them to be as they are? Women, that's who. I rest my case.

For what greater power does one person have over another than that of mother over child? They give them life, perhaps to their own detriment. Does a chink of a woman's soul, a proportion of her spark get transferred by some as-yet-unnamed scientific process to the foetus - and if so is that why most new mothers resemble - to some extent - zombies - because they are partially dead already? Or is their zombiness caused only by the sheer arduousness of the task; in which case shouldn't it be a job for men?

Should women be allowed to raise children? Generally, and I use the word advisedly - partly to prevaricate but also to entertain - one should never generalise about women. Because women don't like being generalised about, generally. What apart from boobos are their qualifications for the job - perhaps the only undeniably important job that there is? Recently there's been fuss in the media about whether or not Catholics should be allowed to raise children; the argument being that if they are allowed to do so there is a danger Catholicism may be passed on to





the young. How much more dangerous to allow women to raise children and allow all woman's myriad faults to be perpetuated. I have no interest in history, it's all water under the bridge in my book, but it was Germaine Greer I believe who kick-started the feminist movement in the sixties by symbolically removing her bra and setting fire to it. She then went on to write a series of bestsellers about the incident: 'Why I burned my bra'; 'How I burned my bra'; 'My bra, burning'; 'May I burn your bra too?'; 'Bras aflame girls, come on!' and so on which established her as an author of high repute. Of course like all pivotal events in the collection of lies we call history it happened by accident to some extent, chance played its part - perhaps she was undressing while fiddling with matches, multi-tasking like they do - ineffectively - but it happened to the right person at the right time and she was able to capitalise on it. Good on her. Don't be a stick in the mud - learn how to surf. Ride the Zeitgeist. Eat your dinner. Don't talk back to your mother. etc.

Fortune favours the brave, but mainly the fortunate. One could enquire as to the psychological aspects: did she find herself blessed with a flat chest, and the bra being superfluous anyway, its accidental inflammation was actually a bonus? Something similar happened to Cassius Clay.

The feminist movement seems bizarre in retrospect, now that it's over. "All men are bastards," they claimed. But why? Could it be because all women are whores? But one cannot blame Germaine for this, or anything, given her gender.

For women to want more power, when they already had 99 per cent of it seems just greedy. If they wanted men to be different to how they are, they must raise their sons

differently. You must raise your boys to do housework, ladies, if you want the housework done. But where will you be? Down the mine? On the battlefield? Boozing? You cannot beat us and join us.

It is said "a woman's work is never done", to which I would add only one word - properly. Recently I conducted a time and motion study on my wife: lots of time, very little motion. And it set me thinking, aside from child rearing what have women ever achieved? A comparative list of great inventors of the past may prove enlightening.

Men: Isaac Newton - who invented the laws of mechanics which make the game of pool possible; Sir Michael Faraday - who invented electricity, without which we couldn't have big screen sport; Albert Einstein - who invented the space-time continuum which enables horse racing; and William Hill. And there are many others. But on the list of Great Female Inventors of The Past there is only one name: Marie Curie. And what did she invent? Cancer.

And what do women do, generally? I've made a list: shop, gossip, and moan. It's not an exhaustive list - one could add of course chores and witchcraft - but those are the main three. On the other hand perhaps moaning has a positive value: it was the Reverend J Malthus, I believe, who wrote, "What are woman's moans but the engine of industrial change? For what is more natural than for the nagged man to repair unto the tavern and plan the future?"

"No woman no cry" sang Bob Marley, correctly: No women - no crying; one woman - some crying; several women - much crying; a nation of women - Woman's Hour. I've been studying women for a long time now, using binoculars mainly, sniffing apparatus, and sound-recording devices which I secrete in their toilets. Nothing to report; I have been unable to hear the audio playback due to the blood thumping in my ears. Yet despite my studies women remain a mystery to me. Who are they? What do they want? If you ask a woman what she wants she'll say sex, but then you give it to them and they say, 'Yes, but that wasn't it, quite'. Why do they want sex anyway? They're not very good at it and they don't enjoy it. And their vaginas are too big.

The word 'bra' undoubtedly comes from the French word 'bra', meaning arm. And that is how a woman feels when she puts on her bra: armed. But let us remember: Breasts are something to be overcome, not come over.



Louis Wain

SAVX + D. QUANTICK

SALES OF MY WORK
HAVE OF LATE DECLINED,
AND MY FINANCES
ARE DEPLETED.

BUT!
I HAVE
MY CATS.

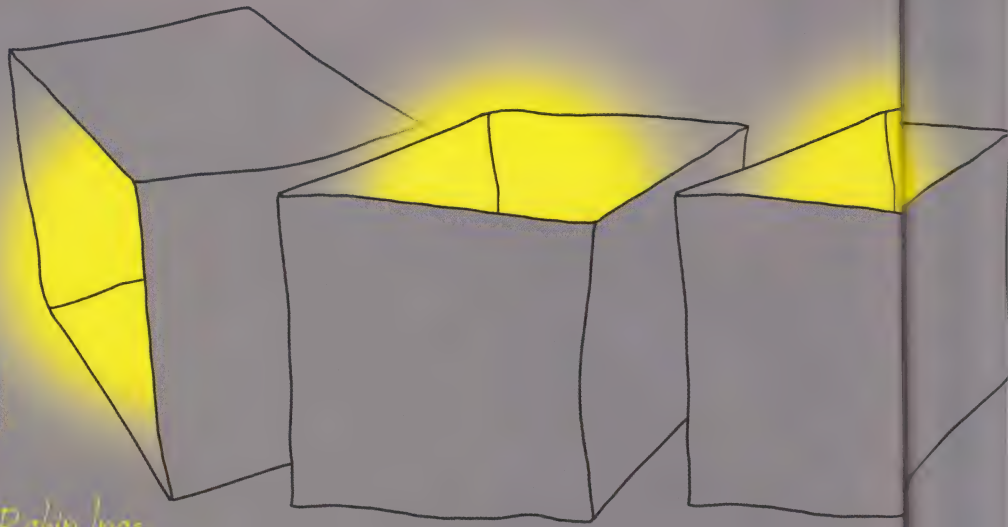
OR IS IT THE
OTHER WAY...





The Mutual Outsider Alienation Spotlight

by Robin Ince



There is a reason I decided to focus on doing stand-up about Schrödinger's cat, benevolent suicidal urges and art hate. Being an observational comedian is fraught with dangers and impending shame. If you are not careful, you may find out that your normal existence is actually a twisted vision of the group's comfortable reality.

So it's gig number one, and you're confident. You'll slay these people with your wry examination of our shared experiences.

You stand on the stage and say, "Hey folks, you know when you do that thing," and you lengthily dissect that thing we do.

An uneasy quiet.

They look back bemused. Some are a little uncomfortable. One is already jumping the sharpened end of a match beneath a fingernail to distract them from their empathetic shame. It is clear is that each of them is thinking: "No, I don't know when I do that thing." Briefly, each one feared that they would be the freak, but the lack of communal laughter has satisfied every individual that they are a happy mass.

At this point the observational comedian is on the back foot. He is quite certain that everyone shared his habit of dipping their hand in the toilet bowl after urinating just to see if the water was warmer. Now, within the first minute of his time on stage, the observer has discovered he may not be as other men.

A blip, that is all. He is certain of his next observation. Didn't he laugh about it with his friend Neil all those years ago?

He talks animatedly about how when we are kids we all go to the graveyard and try and chip off the dress of an angel statue with a screwdriver in the hope of seeing its angelic genitals. This too turns out to be more eccentric than he thought. Surely Neil found it funny? There he is at the back, with another match under his fingernail. The comedian never knew that Neil just laughed along because it was only the two of them, without a group to go by: it was a 50/50 chance one of them was a weirdo. At 11 years old, Neil laughed in case everyone else had a screwdriver and stone angel lust. As the years went by, he had become increasingly certain it was wrong and feels a pang of

guilt about their desecration of that mausoleum in Croxley Green. Maybe he should have told his friend that his impulses were wrong all those years ago rather than letting him find out as he stood on stage in Hanwell. There is a possibility he will never leave Hanwell now.

This is not a true story and yet, every night, it could become a real story. For those who believe in many worlds theory, it is probably a true story somewhere, but one that is unlikely to be empirically proved.

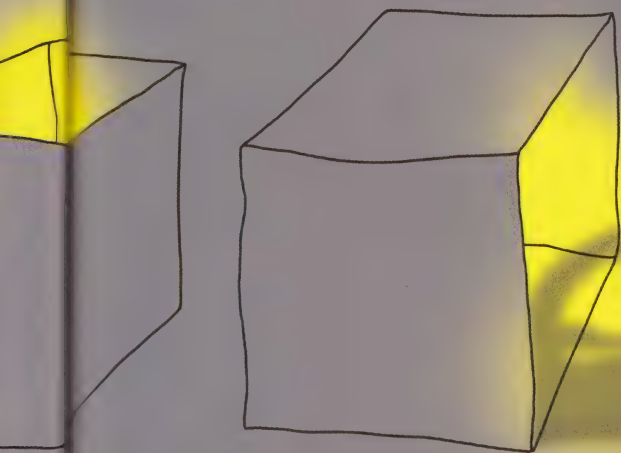
Johnny Vegas, a force of angry nature on stage, used to say, "I am not going to say do you know what it's like when, because none of you know what it's like to be me." Their followed a river of beautiful melancholy.

Observational comedy is a hugely successful business with a comforting message - "Do not worry, we are not individuals". We are one big mass with a very limited variety of reactions to most situations. We feel the same way about our partners. We react the same way when drunk or stoned. Apparently we are vaguely sophisticated ants scurrying in the same direction but with less fear of washing up liquid. Comedy is experiencing a boom at the moment, so you can sit in an arena with 15,000 people looking at each other and saying, "Hahaha, I do that, I do that." This doesn't mean everyone does that, but if you don't do that do you want to be the lone person like a Victorian Punch cartoon shouting, "But I don't do that."

The pressure of the crowd is great. Recent research into why suicide bombers went through with their acts suggested peer pressure was more important than religious or political fervour. The political/religious fervour gets you first of all, but it's the sitting in front of a camera surrounded by your zealous friends saying into the lens why you will be committing your act that pushes you over the edge. The destruction of your life and others occurs because you think, "If I don't blow everyone up what would my mates think? I'd never be able to look them in the eye. Not that I ever will be able to, as mine are about to explode from my skull." I am not comparing laughing at Lee Evans to the actions of a suicide bomber though, but maybe the police should keep an eye on his more zealous fans.

I was recently in Oslo performing at their first alternative comedy festival. One night I was watching an event with my fellow Dodgem Logician Josie Long. All the acts were





speaking in Norwegian - despite my childhood love of Roald Dahl it's a language I have never attempted to grasp. Despite my lack of comprehension I felt compelled to laugh. I was worried about what were all those guffawing around me thinking as I stood smiling. What was wrong with this man who did not find Martin Beyer-Olsen hilarious?¹ He is not like us, why doesn't he laugh? We must throw him harshly on the black ice. I avoided betraying myself by beaming.

Laughter can be very alienating. Sometimes a heckler is furious because others are laughing and he doesn't get it. Their violent fury comes from the sense that your jokes are specifically designed to make him feel stupid. When someone says, "You're just not funny," it is difficult to get into a discussion about the difference between the objective and subjective. (I have got over this by traveling with a Samoan who places any troublemakers in a leather trunk we later leave on waste ground.)

An observation can be true, but too uncomfortable and potentially embarrassing for anyone in an audience to admit.

I was on my way to a gig in February feeling numerous aches and psychosomatic mystery lumps. I was trying to nail down which cancer or cancers I had. On that Monday night I decided it was probably bowel, lung and prostate. My ribs had ached after a particularly strenuous gig, so that was lung. I kept thinking I needed a wee every time I was nowhere near a toilet - so that was prostate. My colon has been spasmodic for many years (since I spent a year living off one cheese and onion sandwich and lots of beers per day) - so that's bowel. I should make it clear that I am a fighter and have never let my hypochondria get in the way of my working life however ill I have imagined myself to be. I am hoping that my bouts of hypochondria will have helped build up my body's immunity when I really get something (not that I'm not saying I don't have something at the moment. I have stomach ache as I type this). As I walked on the stage, I decided to jettison most of my carefully thought-out comparative critique of Flashdance versus Black Swan ("carefully thought out" generally means I thought of it over an hour before the gig). Instead I decided to open with, "So how many of you have ever thought you had cancer?"

Nothing.

Astonishingly it appeared that out of over one hundred people, I was the only person in the room who regularly noticed a lump or felt a vivacious nerve ending cough and thought, "Which cancer this time?" I was not content with their response and felt it best to hector them. Nope, it seemed I was the freak in the room. I opened it out by telling them that I had not always been plagued by thoughts of cancers. In the late eighties I mainly thought I must have AIDS because I had had sex a couple of times. Every stretchmark I happened to notice around my armpit must be a sarcoma of some type or other. This didn't seem to lead to any increase in hands in the air or "YAYS!"

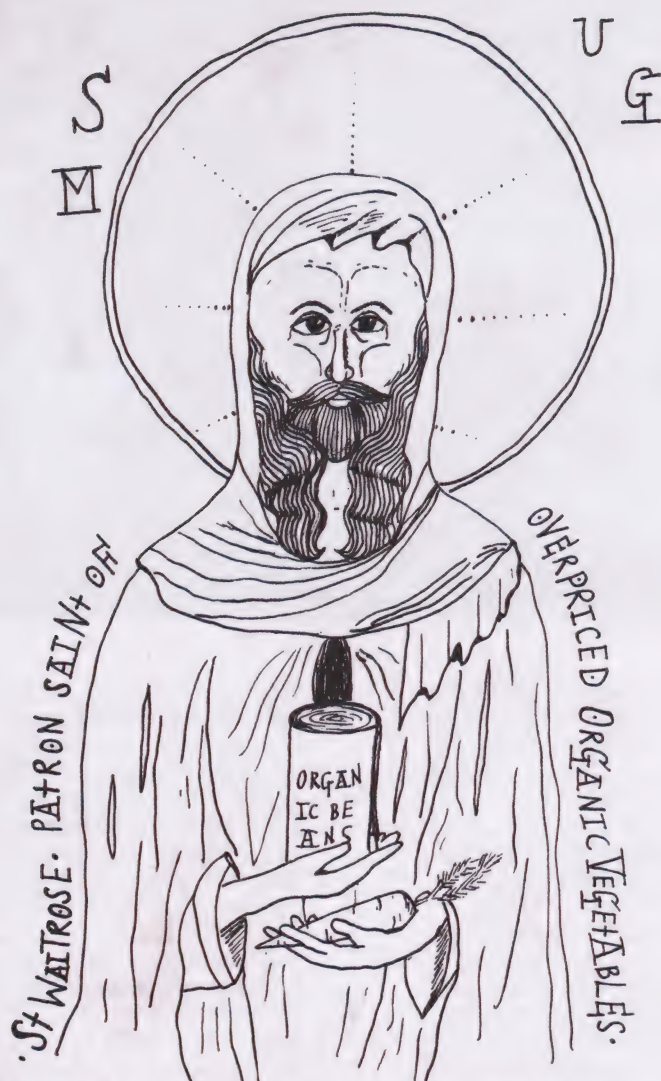
Fortunately at the bar I met a man who confirmed he had spent much of his worrying time in the eighties thinking he had AIDS and later I was sent a message by a woman who said her boyfriend often finds a new cancer on Monday morning, but he felt too embarrassed to put his hand up. So sometimes observational comedy doesn't get a reaction not because it is wrong, it's just that people in the crowd imagine they are the only one and so remain silent. It seems it is more socially acceptable to caterwaul about your husband or wife being hateful than admit you might be unsure of yourself, your health and sanity.

I used to ask the audience how many of them would talk to themselves when they were alone in their house or how many would sometimes do a little dance on their own. There would be some response. Certainly more response than when I told them how as a little boy I was so scared of rabies due to the horrific public information films that I would hold my breath in a not very successful suicide attempt. The moment that would gain the greatest response was when I asked, "How many people here have stood on a train platform and looked at the person in front of them and thought, 'Fuck it, I'm going to shove them in front of the train?'" It seemed the masses were keener to admit psychopathic tendencies than the joy of solitary dance moves.

So I have decided not to perform too much personal observational material. In the worst case scenario, it turns out everyone is like me, and that would never do.

¹Martin Beyer-Olsen was clearly very funny and still made me laugh with some of his movements and facial gesticulating. The game of 'guess the routine via face and arm movements alone' was entertaining in itself.





THE ECO CHAMBER RAINBOW NAZIS

by Dave Hamilton - illustration by Ellie Mains

Some time ago I moved from Northampton to Bristol. My introduction to this new city found me sharing a house with two hardcore environmentalists. I moved with very little, I was single, I had no job to move to (or from) and I was in debt. I took a job in a call centre just to make ends meet, but even then I struggled. The couple were also on a low income yet somehow found money to buy only organic food and only environmentally friendly products and boy were they smug about it.

My job involved taking calls for the anti-smoking helpline, a bitter irony as the job was so soul-destroying I took up smoking again. This was long before I even considered the possibility of bin diving and as I had moved in the autumn there was no chance of me growing any of my own food. I did forage a little, but apples and burdock root can only really make up a small portion of the diet. I felt my hands were tied. If I was to get out of debt, the only choice I had was to buy cheap supermarket food. I knew it was shit, I knew it was damaging to the environment, but when faced with the choice of 10p baked beans (this was a while ago, remember) or the organic equivalent ten times the price at £1 what was I to do? Buying the cheap ones meant I could smoke and the organic ones meant I couldn't - simple as that.

I had a very active environmental conscience, but was forced to make less environmental 'choices' due to my circumstances. The couple didn't see it this way. Instead they would look down their noses at me for having the audacity to buy 'value' washing up liquid for a quarter of the price of the eco-friendly equivalent. I really resented them for their lack of understanding; if I had £10 for food for the week I wasn't going to spend it on a £5 bottle of washing up liquid a loaf of bread and two apples!

The trouble is, whenever something is cheap, there has usually been a saving somewhere else - in other words someone or something else picks up the bill. Take organic carrots, they require extensive hand weeding - the increase in man-hours increases their price. Non-organic carrots get sprayed with a selective herbicide which kills off any surrounding weeds but leaves the carrots alone - saving a substantial amount on man-hours spent weeding and reducing their price considerably.

The real 'cost' of the non-organic carrots comes in reduced bird populations, soil contamination and even certain cancers and Parkinson's disease in humans. The farmer may well be aware of this but without a market



for organic carrots and the necessary labour force, he may have no choice but to grow environmentally destructive non-organic ones. Add this to increased yields due to sprays dealing with pests and diseases and you can really see why non-organic carrots are so much cheaper. By the time the carrots hit the shelves, all the consumer will see is an organic bag for four times the price of a non-organic bag.

Is the farmer to blame for wanting a guaranteed crop for a guaranteed market?

Is the consumer to blame for trying to save a little money?

Now let's go back 100 years. There are no 'organic' and 'non-organic' carrots, there are only carrots (although there is a good chance they would have been sprayed with arsenic or other proto-agricheicals). As it does now, their price reflected the price of production, transport costs and a small cut from the shopkeeper.

But did the consumer feel virtuous knowing she (remember these were pre-suffragette times) was helping local farmers or local shopkeepers? I doubt it, she just bought carrots. Compared with today a much bigger portion of a household allowance was spent on food, nearer to one third or 30 per cent of a household income rather than today's figure of between 10 and 15 per cent. It is likely people resented the high price of food, but it is also likely food was valued a lot more and a lot less was wasted. There was no doubt some discrepancy between the rich and the poor as the rich could afford to buy more choice cuts of meat or luxury foods such as foie gras, smoked salmon and caviar. Yet, by and large, if you wanted fresh vegetables everyone had to buy the same thing.

Things began to change and in the thirty years following the Second World War we had a huge surge in the use of herbicides, pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. Yields went up, food prices went down.

This new method of using chemicals became so ubiquitous it came to be known as 'conventional' farming, whereas the chemical-free methods came to be called 'organic'. Our use of language compounds this as we tend to call non-organic products 'conventional' when really we should be calling them 'sprayed' or 'slightly toxic' and use the word 'conventional' to mean organic.

Now organic isn't seen as the 'ordinary' choice, the choice of the people, it is seen as some bourgeois luxury most can't afford. Food is the first thing most with a restricted income will try to cut down on. Food is a very tangible saving; if you are skint a loaf for £2.50 is less likely to go into a shopping basket than one for £1. That simple choice saves you £1.50, who cares where the £1 loaf came from! What if there was yet another choice, a 50p loaf which bore the label 'we drown a bag of puppies for every loaf you buy'? Would you buy it? Perhaps you would buy it once, feel guilty and swear never to buy it again. Two weeks of not buying it you'll start to weigh it up in your head, 'Hmmm, perhaps they were very sick puppies, yes, they were puppies which were suffering and drowning them just means they don't have to suffer - yes, that's it, I'm actually alleviating puppy suffering by buying the 50 pence loaf'.

We make choices of this kind every day - need a new t-shirt? A sweat shop one is £1 or fair-trade organic is £25, you have £30 in your pocket and you want to buy a t-shirt and go out that evening, what do you do? If

you choose the sweat shop one does that make you a bad person or are the real criminals the sweat shop owners and the large European or US company that sell the clothes?

Of course if nobody chose the sweat shop t-shirt then they wouldn't sell it, but if the choice is there people still will. (If it was me I'd look around charity shops/thrift stores for a £1 bargain.)

Consumer choice does go a long way but it seems to me that if we live in a society which will outlaw creosote to paint our fences, yet will allow food with nerve toxins in it, something is very wrong! In a fair society any product which is environmentally damaging or damaging to human health would be outlawed or heavily taxed.

Tax breaks could be set up to fund less harmful alternatives, and the price of organic food, fair trade products and environmentally friendly goods would drop considerably (and with it the class barrier for such goods).

At present every time we wish to make an environmental choice we are penalised for it financially. If I want to have a holiday in mainland Europe a flight will cost me around a quarter of the price of a train. If I want to paint my house with environmentally friendly paint then it will also cost me a great deal more than a more toxic 'conventional' equivalent.

If the airlines were heavily taxed and this money went into subsidized public transport on the ground we would see a massive reduction in train fares and a rise in air-fares. If the main incentive was financial then no doubt we would see a big change in the 'choices' people would make.

E.F. Schumacher, the economist, writer and environmentalist, said in his short book 'A guide for the perplexed' (published the same year that Star Wars was released - 1977):

"Can we rely on it that a "turning around" will be accomplished by enough people quickly enough to save the modern world? This question is often asked, but no matter what the answer, it will mislead. The answer "Yes" would lead to complacency, the answer "No" to despair. It is desirable to leave these perplexities behind us and get down to work."

Climate scientists have no doubt we are headed for disaster, yet if we dwell on this for too long as Mr Schumacher rightly says, we will give in to despair. This generation has been given a shit stick from the last, a time bomb waiting to go off. We can make simple choices in what we buy (if we can afford to) we can even grow our own food or make our own clothes. But I don't think it is healthy to feel guilty about it if you can't due to lack of money, skills or time. Nor do I think it is healthy to berate someone else for not doing as you do. The 'inconvenient truth' is it is no longer our children's generation that will see food shortages, climate chaos, floods, war and famine. It is ours. Complaining that someone hasn't bought an organic apple won't change that fact. Using that energy to protest (while it is still allowed), to lobby governments, and to set up community food projects might go a little way towards making the world a better place and creating a choice that will be healthy for us and the world we live in.





Against Toilets

by Margaret Killjoy

Toilets, at the very least those conceived by western cultures, are a blindingly stupid idea. Civilization is full of incredibly stupid ideas, actually. But for the purposes of this article, I'll stick to toilets.

Toilets are a bad idea because flushing our sewage is stupid and because the sitting position is a stupid one to be in when you shit. Toilets were an improvement at the time, don't get me wrong, we do have to deal with our sewage. Ignoring it is poisonous, and any sedentary community of even a modest population density is going to have to do something with their shit. So yes, moving to toilets was a step in the right direction. But they were a half-revolution.

Squat The Toilets!

I was first introduced to the concept of toilet squatting when I walked in on my friend. We were living in a squatted tenement building, and the toilet in the basement had only a shower curtain to surround it. I opened up the curtain and there she was, feet planted on the toilet seat, squatting to crap. I backed out, apologized, and then asked what she was doing.

It was pretty simple, she explained. When you squat, you go more easily, more quickly, and more completely. She got used to it doing forest defense and never stopped. Made sense, I figured, but I still didn't try.

Then I started to get hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids are little swollen pouches of blood that form when the veins in your ass get out of whack. It's pretty irritating... they don't really go away very easily and they hurt like hell if you walk a lot. Being a traveler, it was quite inconvenient.

Anyhow, I stopped through Santa Cruz about a year later and saw a poster about toilet squatting in the bathroom at a forest-punk house. It had a diagram that compared a rectum when squatting and when sitting. From that day forth, not only was I a squatter, but I was a toilet squatter as well.

Health issues: Toilet squatting isn't scientifically proven to cure hemorrhoids, but I'm pretty sure it helped me out. Squatting to crap straightens out the colon, allowing you to clear yourself out better. There's this wonderful little muscle called the puborectalis muscle that keeps your rectum shut unless it's relaxed, which it can't do in a sitting position.

Then there's the ileocecal valve, which connects your small intestine to your colon.

And, surprise surprise, it shuts itself completely when you squat, but not when you sit. The result of sitting? Minor leakage of fecal matter back up into your system. Oh and there's a natural kink there, where the colon attaches to your intestines. It straightens itself out when your thighs, in the squatting position, are up against your abdomen.

Further, it's been suggested that when your colon isn't fully emptied your feces kind of rots inside you, causing any number of ill-effects, including an increased risk of colon cancer.

How to do it: In most of the world, there are squat toilets. Whether they flush or not, they're set into the ground and ready to squat over. The Middle-East, Asia, Africa, Central and South America, even large parts of southern and western Europe all have squat toilets. But reportedly, some asshat in the 19th century decided that squatting was undignified and that a true person of worth would sit, as upon a throne, while they defecated.

If you've got your shoes on, you put the seat up and squat on the rim. In your socks or barefooted, squat on the seat. At first, yes, it's hard to balance. Put your hand on the wall, or the toilet-paper dispenser, or the handicap bars, whatever, to support yourself. Within weeks you'll be squatting like a pro, and you'll never want to go back to sitting again.

The only downsides I've ever noticed are: it's hard to explain to strangers, you have no telltale feet to be seen in a public restroom (when the locks don't work) and there is a slightly increased risk of splash-back. And I used to do a lot of reading on the toilet, but now everything goes too smoothly and quickly to bother.



In my years proselytizing the virtues of toilet-squatting, I learned that it isn't for everyone. It's harder for some differently-abled people, sometimes due to age or size, to negotiate themselves into the precarious squatting position on a toilet. Some people have jury-rigged solutions by placing a near-toilet-height stool [no pun intended] or some-such in front of the toilet to put their feet, in a sort of compromise position with their legs raised.

Shit liberation

I'm certain that the first industrialists thought that dumping smoke into the sky was harmless. There is just so *much* sky, how could they possibly be mucking it up? But muck it up they did.

There is a circle to life that we've broken: we take nutrients out of the soil, digest them, shit them out, then flush them into the river. (Yes, it's often treated first, but it is still flushed into the river). This is mind-bogglingly stupid. We then spend an unforgivable amount of energy on fertilizers and other methods of providing nutrition to our plants. Composting our human "waste", creating what is called "humanure", is the only sane course of action available to us.

It's like we're cutting down the forest around our house for firewood and then heating our house with the front door open.

I can't speak for too many parts of the world, but in many places I've been humanure is illegal, composting toilets are illegal. Doing anything other than flushing your shit into the river is illegal, more or less. This is as absurd to me as the laws that dictate I must be pumped full of chemicals after I die before I can be buried, and god forbid my friends do the burial somewhere in the woods where I can continue to feed the soil.

Fortunately, it's not illegal everywhere. And of course, law influences but does not dictate behavior.

I just can't take any environmentalist seriously who won't question the flush toilet.

For Science To Live, Civilization Must Die

It's not just the toilets.

I would argue (mostly for fun, I admit: there isn't too much of a point in strongly holding one's own definitions of words over the definitions that others use) that civilization can be described by its linear thinking. (To refer back to my dictionary, civilization is **"the stage of human social development and organization that is considered most advanced."** "Most advanced" strikes me as pretty linear thinking.)

Science is always equated with civilization, but I'd love to see the two concepts divorced. Science is a system with which to explore the natural laws of our world, to develop technologies with. And yet science has been held at the mercy of civilization. Civilization refuses to go back. It encourages us only to push forward, it argues that anything newly developed is more worthwhile than what came before. It does not let us question our fundamentals.

And the world is in dire peril. We need to question our fundamentals. In regards to toilets, we need to "revert" to the composting toilet and "revert" to the squat toilet before we can find our way forward again.

We need to question why certain technologies prevailed and others languished in obscurity. It doesn't necessarily reflect an innate superiority of the technology that won. The internal combustion engine won out over the electric engine over a hundred years ago not because it was objectively "better", but because it was better suited for warfare. The fixed-wing aircraft is the same story. Most of the "fatal flaws" of airships are easily conquered by modern science, but our society has the damndest time pondering a reversion to "antiquated" technology, despite the amazing green-travel potential offered by lighter-than-air craft.

Capitalism has, of course, poisoned research motivation utterly. Technologies are not developed so as to be appropriate to a natural world (or even for their aesthetic values, which I would consider worthwhile and enriching as well), but instead to maximize profit. Even setting ethics aside, this makes for a profoundly uninteresting culture.

I call upon you to unfetter the sciences from the chains of the civilized world. Let us instead be free. Free to close the cycle of life and free to float above the world drinking cognac in our dirigibles.



EAT TO THE BEAT

by Wendi Jarrett

EEK POTATO & QUINOA SOUP

This lovely winter soup makes the most of the best of English winter root vegetables. You can cook it in the traditional lidded saucepan on top of the cooker or in an energy-saving slow cooker. Where possible use organically grown fresh vegetables... the flavour is significantly tastier and you will save money and time, as you don't need to peel, just give them a good scrub in a bowl and retain the soluble fibre and Vitamin C. My uncle-in-law Peter gave us a huge bag of Cara potatoes, which he grew and they are really lovely for baking, soups and roasting... everything really. I've checked out their 'pedigree' and they are quite blight resistant and high yield. Cara potatoes have a floury texture and are great when boiled, baked, roasted and chipped. Cara is very disease resistant to scab, blight, PCN and also has excellent resistance to slugs. Cara potatoes are also quite tolerant to drought, just what we need if we have a summer like last!

Quinoa (pron. Kin-wah) is a grain, full of vital nutrients and a real boon to both the vegetarian diet and to boosting the quality of soups, stews, casseroles and the like. It's a South American grain, known also as 'chesiya mama', the mother grain. What makes it so unique is that it is a complete protein (on a par with meat or fish). It contains all 8 essential amino acids, is rich in Omega 3, 6 and 9 and many minerals. As it's a seed and not a grain, it is also gluten-free. It has many uses and when cooked becomes soft and almost transparent, a very economical way to add extra protein to vegetarian dishes and it's a great store cupboard standby. A weird by-the-by, Quinoa became a 'big' thing with body-builders because it's high protein, no fat!

INGREDIENTS

Serves 6 or batch freeze

- rapeseed oil
- 2 sticks of celery - washed and chopped small
 - 1 small red onion - chopped small
 - 1 small white onion - chopped small
 - 3 cloves of garlic
 - 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 4 medium sized potatoes (Cara is a lovely variety) - washed and cubed
 - 4 large sized leeks - washed and chopped
- 1½ ltrs of water (or you can use a flavoured stock)
- 2 tbsp. Organic quinoa grains (Tip: Use a sieve to rinse and drain)
 - freshly grated nutmeg - ¼ tsp approx.
- freshly ground black pepper and sea salt - to taste

METHOD FOR USING A SLOW COOKER

- Whilst you are washing and cutting the veg, pre-heat the slow cooker on high.
- Place chopped vegetables and quinoa into the Slow Cooker and add the stock and dried seasonings. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours, or on a timer overnight for the same.
- Using a hand blender - process to your preferred texture. Taste, add seasoning and more hot water if you like a less thick soup.
- Check seasoning and dish up, with crusty bread if liked.

METHOD FOR COOKING ON TOP OF THE COOKER IN A LARGE LIDDED SAUCEPAN.

- Place the onions, garlic and celery in a microwave-proof bowl with a tbsp of oil and cook on high for 5 mins. Put into the saucepan.
- Place the remaining chopped vegetables and quinoa into the saucepan and add the stock/water and dried seasonings. Cover and cook on medium heat until bubbling, then turn down to lowest heat and cook until all the veg is soft (20 mins). Remove from heat. Continue as in last step 'for using slow cooker'.



SPICED-UP PARKIN

Parkin, like flapjacks are a real 'rib-sticking' treat. I love making this and it is great to pack up in some grease-proof paper for when you're out and about, for the work pack-up, or for striding out on a crisp winter's weekend walk. But you can serve this warm with hot, vanilla-infused custard... yum.

INGREDIENTS

Pre-heat oven to Gas Mark 1, 140°C, 275°F

- 50g molasses or black treacle
 - 50g golden syrup
 - 30g margarine
- 40g light muscovado sugar
 - 120g medium oatmeal
- 60g self-raising flour - (sifted)
- 5 tps. ground ginger (or mix 3tsp ground ginger and 2 tsp of grated fresh root ginger)
 - ½ tsp of ground pimento berries (allspice)
 - 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
 - a good pinch of salt
 - 2 eggs - beaten
 - 2 dstspn. milk

METHOD

- Place large saucepan on the scales, then weigh the syrup/treacle into it.
- Add the margarine and sugar, and place on a low heat until the margarine has melted.
Keep an eye on the pan all the time, don't let it boil
- In a bowl mix the oatmeal, flour, spices and salt together. Slowly stir into the syrup until it is completely blended.
- Next add the beaten egg and then the milk.
- Pour the mixture into a lined tin - (non-stick/silicon paper) and bake in the centre of the oven for 1½ hrs or until the centre feels springy to the touch.
- Cool the parkin for 10 mins (it will firm up when cold), then cut into squares. Allow to go cold then remove from tin. OR cut whilst warm and serve with hot custard infused with vanilla.
If you like more bite to your parkin, use ½ pin-head and ½ medium oatmeal.

For more info on healthy foods email: info@wendjarrett.co.uk

Most of the ingredients can be found /requested from Daily Bread Co-operative - Bedford Road, Northampton.



THE URBAN GUERRILLA GARDENER

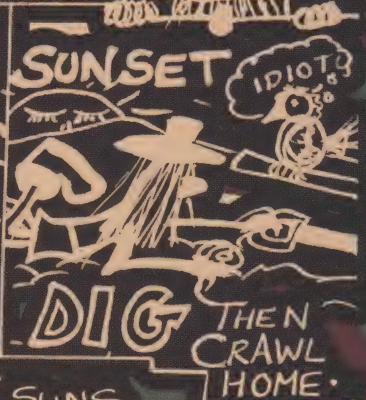
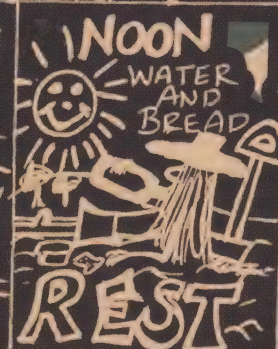
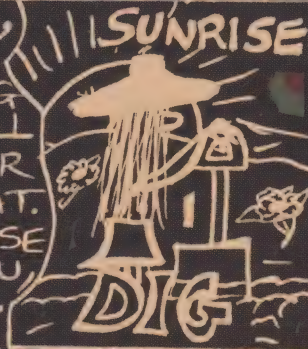
MY GUIDE TO BLOOD, SWEAT, TEARS, JOY AND HAPPINESS! SO HAPPY NEW YEAR PEOPLE ♥

THIS COMING YEAR, THE SEASONS AND WEATHER WILL BRING MANY CHALLENGES, ALL GOOD. EVERY GARDENER IS IN THE SAME BOAT. SO IF YOU GET DISEASE OR PLANTS DIE ON YOU, IT IS NOT FAILURE. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

THE ORCHID GROWER, THE NOVICE AND THE TRIER ARE EQUALLY AFFECTED BY NATURE'S AMBIVALENCE TO HUMAN KIND. THIS CAN BE CHANGED. THE JOY OF WATCHING A TINY, TINY SEED GROW INTO A FULLY GROWN, AMAZING, WONDER OF NATURE IS PRICELESS. TAKE THE SUNFLOWER SEED FOR EXAMPLE.

THE AMOUNT OF SEEDS YOU CAN PLANT IS HUGE. THE MORE SEEDS TO HARVEST. MORE SUNFLOWERS. NATURE, THE WONDER OF LIFE, AND THE JOY OF BEING OUTSIDE WILL EXPAND THE MIND, HEALTH AND WELL BEING. FEEL THE JOY WHEN SUDDENLY OUT OF NOWHERE BIRDS APPEAR, BEES ARRIVE AND ALL THE LITTLE LIVES THAT HELP THE WORLD THRIVE BECOME IMPORTANT. THE BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLY, THE BAT, THE BEETLE, THE WASP, THE FROG, THE NETTLE, THE DOCK LEAF, THE ANT, THE SNAKE AND THE UNDERESTIMATED LOWLY WORM ARE ALL

LOW LIFE IN HIGH PLACES.

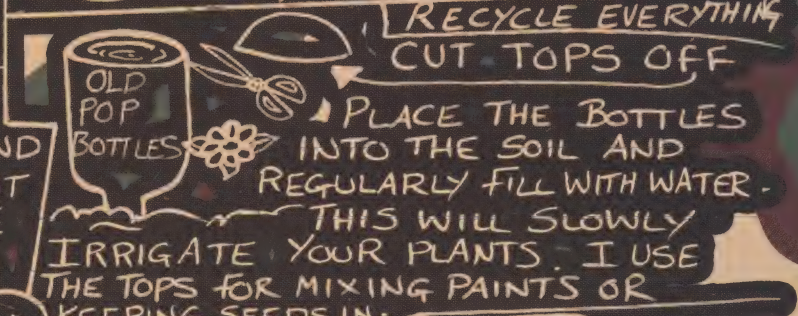
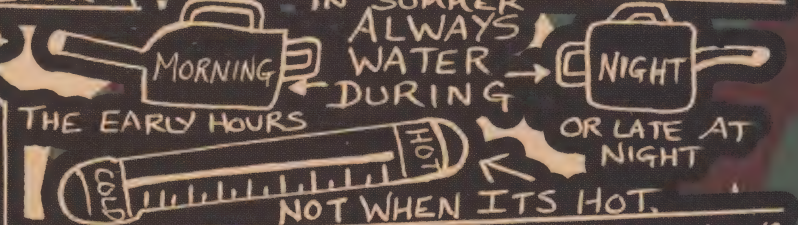
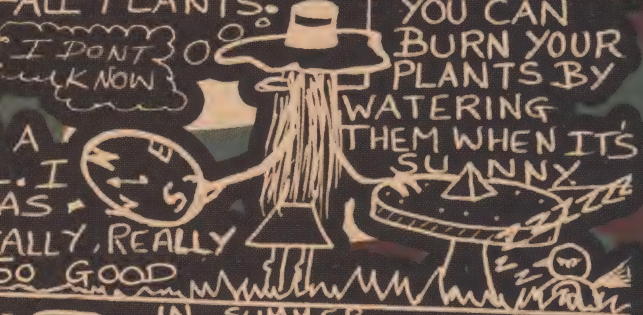


ENCOURAGE (6 FT) → 8 FT EASY, SOMETIMES 20 FT EVERYONE TO GROW ONE

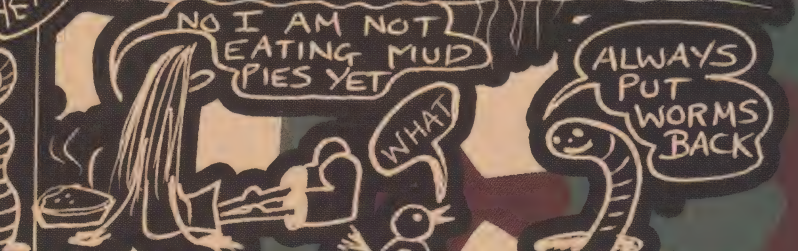


TRY TO MAKE A SUN DIAL. I DID, IT WAS CRAP (REALLY, REALLY CRAP. "SO GOOD LUCK".

CHECK THE SUNS DIRECTION ON YOUR LAND. SUN AND SHADE ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT FOR ALL PLANTS.

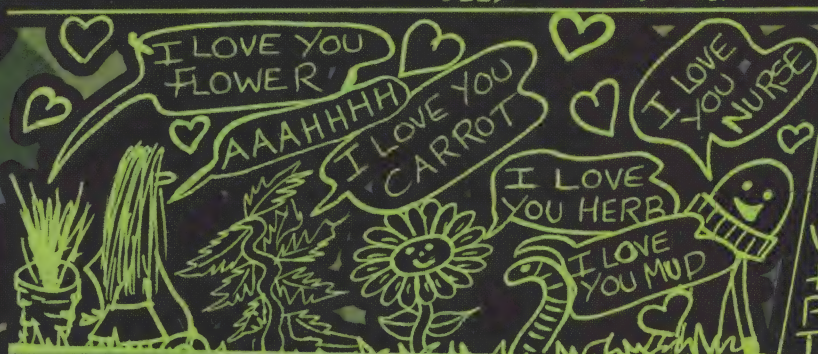


THIS YEAR... I WILL START TO SIEVE MY SOIL.



USED TEA BAGS ARE GOOD FOR THE SOIL. ALSO B.B.Q ASH, OR ASH FROM THE BONFIRE, SHREDDED NEWSPAPERS, CRUSHED UP EGG SHELLS AND SHARP SAND. SHARP SAND IS CHEAP, IT HELPS TO BREAK UP HEAVY SOIL, ALSO YOU CAN MIX IT WITH SEEDS THAT ARE REALLY SMALL TO HELP SPACE THEM OUT WHEN SOWING.

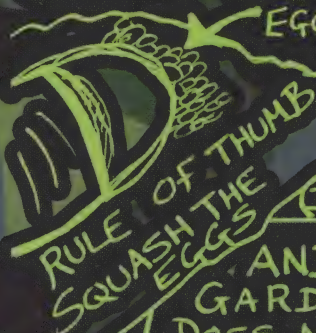
SEED ← SAND → SEED ← SAND →



PLANTS LIKE EACH OTHER'S COMPANY. MARIGOLDS LOVE CARROTS. MINT AND BEDDING PLANTS LOOK GREAT. RUNNER BEANS ARE STUNNING WHEN THEY ARE IN FLOWER, THEY ARE BRIGHT RED AND PINK AND THEN TASTY.

--- JUST LOOK

THIS IS NOT JUST A LOVE AFFAIR. IT'S SYMBIOSIS, ONE PLANT WILL NOT ONLY ATTRACT CREATURES THAT POLLINATE AND ARE GOOD FOR YOUR LAND, THEY CAN ALSO DETER OTHERS THAT ARE NO GOOD. I HAD A HUGE PROBLEM WITH THE CURSE OF THE CABBAGE WHITE BUTTERFLY LAST YEAR.



EGGS I PLANTED SOME CABBAGES ON SOME WASTE-LAND (FAR AWAY) SO I DID NOT FEEL SO GUILTY ABOUT SQUASHING THEIR BABY BUTTERFLYS. I DON'T LIKE GROWING CABBAGES.

SORRY MATE



AND NOW IMPOSSIBLE GARDENERS' WORLD, THAT DOES NOT EXIST WITHOUT STAFF.

BULBS: GOOD IDEA

CROCUS, DAFFODILS, HYACINTH, SNOW DROPS, TULIPS AND BLUE BELLS. ALL SPRING UP IN SPRING!



DO NOT WATCH THESE PATRONISING T.V. SHOWS (DON'T!)

THAT ONE LOOKS FAMILIAR

THEY MAKE EVERYONE FEEL USELESS. AND DUUUURRRR IT'S TELLY.

ALWAYS SWAP YOUR GARDEN ROUND. SOME LAND SHOULD BE LEFT FALLOW SO IT CAN REST. (NO PLANTING)



DO ALL GARDENERS HATE GARDEN GNOMES? THAT IS THE QUESTION?

MY LAND IS LIKE THIS :- BEETROOT → FLOWER → BEETROOT → LINE OF SPRING ONIONS DOWN THE MIDDLE → PATCH OF LETTUCE → TOMATOES AND RUNNER BEANS ALONG THE BACK ON TRELLIS → RHUBARB → HERBS → POTATOES → FLOWERS → LEEKS → FLOWERS → ROSES → HERBS → RADISH → STRAWBERRY → CARROTS → FLOWERS → HERBS



TWELVE INCH BLACK CLOCKS

If you are a charity shop junkie like myself then you probably have a house full of whimsical annuals, hilariously titled records and other assorted tat. I have recently discovered the joy of the clock movement, a relatively cheap bit of kit that will transform this weeks 50p find into a work of interior design genius...

Required Stuff...

An Old Record*
or other object that
might feasibly be a clock
(it does not have to be a
round thing!) records are
kinda handy with their
thoughtful holes.

Clock Movement

I bought mine from a lovely man on ebay for a couple of quid or you could reuse the bits from an old clock. The kits are pretty handy though and should come with hands and instructions.

Black Marker Pen

Protractor

(or a sheet of paper
plus basic maths)

Acrylic Spray-Paint

(if you want to change
the colour of the hands)

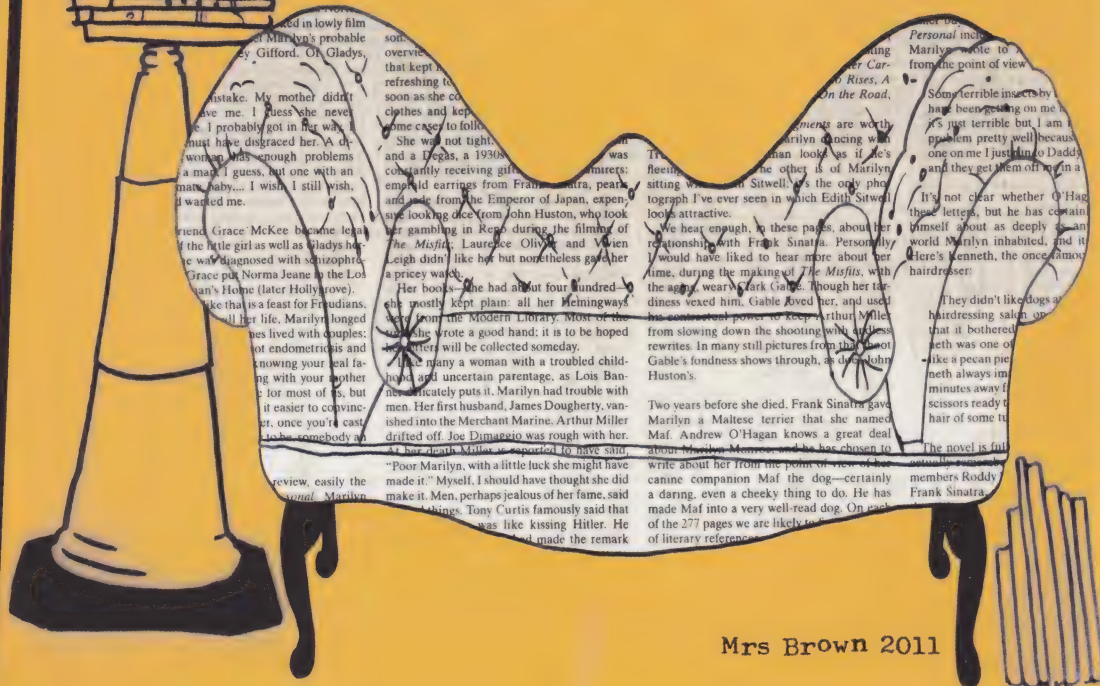
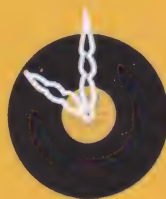
Something To Make Numbers With

Im going to print them
off on the computer
and paste them on.
For which I will
also need...

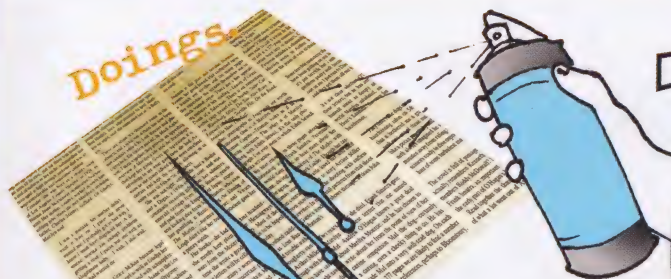
PVA Glue & Brush

Craft Knife or Scissors

Alternatively you could just scrawl them on with a marker pen or leave it blank if you dont get annoyed by clocks with no numbers/care what time it is.



Doings



If you want to spray-paint the clock hands an interesting colour then do it first so they have plenty of drying time while you muck about with the rest of the stuff.

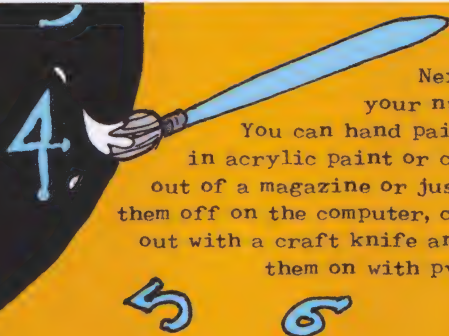
They will need a couple of coats - its worth doing, it really makes a difference to the finished effect. NB. Black hands on black vinyl - not such a good choice.



Next mark off your 12 hours, if you are using the protractor its 30° per section.

Or if you dont have such a thing then improvise... get a square of thin paper, fold it into quarters and then into thirds to get 12 equal sections. Lay this over the clock making sure your centres line up by poking a biro through the paper and then the hole. Make sure your 12 is at the top of the record (ie the label is the right way up!)

Mark dots on the vinyl with the black marker for each number in an inconspicuous place.



Next make your numbers. You can hand paint them in acrylic paint or cut them out of a magazine or just print them off on the computer, cut them out with a craft knife and paste them on with pva glue.

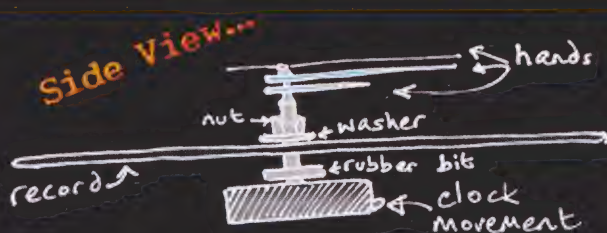
Paste the back of the number, position it on the clock face and then give it a second thin coat of glue.

Alternatively you could use buttons, bits of electrical tape, anything really! Or just leave it blank, not a practical choice but it looks nice and minimal that way...

You are probably going to need to make the hole in the vinyl a bit bigger, a soldering iron is the best thing to use it will melt a bigger hole and you wont have to fret about breaking the record by drilling it.



If you are using something that will need drilling (ie something without a hole in it already) then first make a mark with a hammer and nail, then drill and sand it. It needs to end up at about 8mm diameter.



The clock movement should come with instructions but essentially you poke the spindle through the hole and secure it with a washer and a nut. Then add the hands (point them both at 12). Stick your battery in and tadaa! A deliriously lovely object is born. Trust me you will be smug all day with your creative chops.

Stupidly easy to do and a great way to make a lovely functional thing out of alleged junk. They make good pressies too...

Mess with your meaty-headed linear perceptions (a bit) Make a clock that runs backwards!

This is fiddly but not hard..

Before you start assembling your clock, crack open the back of the movement with a small screwdriver.

Essentially you take out the electro-magnet and reverse it, thus reversing the polarity of the magnet and making the mechanism run backwards.

The electro magnet is the coppery wirey fella with the U shaped bit of metal poked through it.

Take the cogs out of the mechanism remember you are going to have to put them back in the right places!

Take the magnet out of the clock and pull the u-shaped bit out, flip it over (prongs still pointing down) and put it back. Be really careful of the fine copper wires if you break them its all over.

You might have to plier off a few plastic pegs to make it all fit together again. Then put the cogs back in, put the back on, stick your battery back in...

Hopefully now your clock is running backwards!

If not something s gone awry... have a look online for a better explanation hopefully with photos!





The Spinning Doctors

Nervy and travel therapy

Most of us get to understand ourselves better as the years pass. But you can speed up, or slow down the process.

Nervy's belief is that travel is a good way of speeding things up without necessarily shelling out on a therapist. If you want someone to really listen to your stories, and respond appropriately, then perhaps paying for it is more reliable - but it's doubtfully cheaper, not nearly so much fun, and creates fewer possibilities.

Travelling can be amazing with or without your aunt, brother, partner or friend, but it will be very different if you travel alone rather than with company. Good travelling companions are hard to find (again, you could try paying) but if you travel alone you may find yourself talking to people more, so it's arguably better. Nevertheless if there's someone you truly love, Nervy would recommend you travel with him or her and explore the inner and outer world, and your love for each other together.

The key to travel therapy is watching and meeting people: whether alone or not, making a habit of catching a stranger's eye and going over to talk, wherever you are. It is even more productive if you aren't feeling desperate for company (and therefore can be objective about the response). If you don't know what to say, you can always compliment them about their clothes or ask where they are travelling to. Almost everyone likes to talk about themselves, and if they don't, just move on.

If you listen, you might make a friend, and you will certainly learn something about different cultures and different ways of looking at things. You will learn how to cope with mild rejection or a potential stalker. If they turn out to be a serial killer, all the more interesting perhaps. Play a game: have a guess what he or she will be like beforehand and then see if you get it right. Good for analysing stereotypes and prejudices.

It is also good for sorting out your own personality characteristics or mental pathologies. Why did you select that person to talk to? Was he really sexy or did she look attractive? Or were both of them just non-threatening in some way? Did he look lonely or vulnerable? Was she giving you subtle eye contact? Do you always end up talking to the same type of person? If so, work out why and try to talk to people you would normally avoid or ignore, as an experiment.

Nervy's full guide to travel psychotherapy will be out soon, but don't buy it: the content of some books can be reduced to less than a sheet of A4 and you have that here. Go places. Talk to people. Reflect. Chill out.

Nervy has to give you some boring warnings about travel, however. Firstly you will almost certainly have to return home and it is best not to bring your holiday lover with you. It is a holiday. Have a great time. Recognising your holiday dreams for what they are will let you

enjoy them without pain. The only significant things you will be able to bring home with you are your photographs, your memories, your debts, and someone else's sexually transmitted disease. And the only way you're likely to stay out there permanently is in prison for possession of illegal substances.

The holiday lover who wants to come back with you is perhaps the worst souvenir and the most frequent complication of travel therapy, so to avoid legal proceedings, Nervy has to add the usual warning strap-line here: "Travel therapy may also cause unwanted relationships, STDs, marriage, divorce, exacerbation of existing mental illnesses and death." Probably not death, but you have to say these things, the editor says. If you do not know already, you will soon learn that some people who don't live in the UK would like to do so, and if you do your travel therapy enthusiastically you will receive numerous proposals of marriage, and everyone without exception will want to come and stay with you when they visit London (which is where you should tell them you live) and to borrow money from you. There is a simple remedy though: give false telephone numbers and e-mail addresses and never accept them as friends on Facebook. This is seriously good advice, even though you won't take it. Believe Nervy, but always be prepared to make exceptions.

Apart from the death warning, the editor has requested Nervy to offer some physical health advice: this is so sensible that most of you will skip the next paragraph but here goes: immunisations, anti-malarials, an EHIC card, travel and health insurance, preferably a credit card, and don't lose your passport or carry drugs. But perhaps the main health advice is to remember that in many parts of the world life is incredibly cheap and no-one apart from you will be looking after your safety. The AA, UK coastguard, Community Support Officers and NHS GPs do not operate beyond these shores: You are on your own, mate, and anything that goes wrong will cost you in all sorts of ways. Use your brain.

But returning to Nervy's preferred theme: world travel forces an internal journey which is always interesting. This is a true adventure with an unpredictable destination which gets closer with every delay and cancellation, diversion, unexpected problem, strange meeting and coincidence. Why do certain things annoy you more than others? Analyse. Learn to chill.

The Psychotherapist stereotypically repeats the statements you make to her about your life with a questioning voice. So from time to time on your journey lie back, think of England, and change those thoughts into questions... But most of the time just lie back and enjoy the journey and what it's doing for you.

Nervy reckons that anything you're eventually likely to wish you'd started doing long ago and done much more often is best started on right away. Which is why he is writing this somewhere over the South China Sea on the way from Hong Kong to Sydney.



WRAP up your well-being

by Dr Feelgood

Wrapping paper has so many functions at Christmas. I recognise the presents from my wife by the carefully crafted wrapping, and the lack of Sellotape, demonstrating the care and thought she puts into present giving. Gifts that demonstrate the giver has thought about what we want or need are especially precious. One week later on New Year's Eve, like Janus we look back and forwards reflecting on what has been and, with varying amounts of fear or enthusiasm, looking forward to what will be - death and new life. This was poignant for me this year as I approach a new decade and a friend three years younger than me died on New Year's Eve unexpectedly.

WRAP

Well-being recovery and action planning (WRAP) describes a process that brings together an awareness of what enables our recovery from mental distress with developing plans and putting them into action. Essentially it is using a planning cycle (plan, do, study, act) in our personal lives, focusing on continual small steps that improve or maintain our well-being.

Well-being

Over the last few issues I have been describing the New Economic Foundation (NEF) "Five Fruits of Well-Being". They reviewed the Foresight report on Mental Capital and Well-Being, which brought together many national and some international researchers in the field of well-being.

NEF describe the following five actions in our day-to-day lives as important for creating and maintaining well-being

Connect

Connect with the people around you. Connect with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Connect at home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Take notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Keep learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

Give

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

Recovery

We all feel angst - the perception that where we are is not where we want to be. At times this goes beyond pressure to become stress, distress, dis-ease or disease. This process of continual pressure affecting our mood can take some time as we gradually fall into the pit of despair. Dealing with these feelings on a daily basis and early intervention can prevent us falling into the pit. Recovery is our ongoing journey climbing out of the pit back towards contentment and peace (accepting our own personal responsibility for our recovery is one of the first steps to recovery). As a general practitioner much of the time I see people wanting me to take responsibility for their problems.

My wife's Christmas present was Tim Parks' "Teach Us to Sit Still." He describes his search for healing from chronic pelvic pain. Seeking his healing through the usual medical routes is unsuccessful; his gradual progress with meditation enables the pain to be eased. This is not a dramatic salvation but rather a gradual change to a new rhythm of life.

Psychological salvation does not occur without personal effort. Most of the people I see with mood disorder are too busy and not giving themselves enough space to recover, stuck in unhelpful habits, usually thinking too much and not giving themselves permission to do something different. When I started meditating I found it really difficult to give myself a space and time for my own well-being, despite logically knowing the importance of this, so I sympathise with this dilemma. We need to be able to reclaim our time so that we can take a step back and review where we are so we can take steps forward.

Action

Do something different. One of my favourite quotes is Einstein's "madness is doing the same thing and expecting different results". Recovery is dynamic; too often New Year's resolutions become a static declaration of intent and do not follow the ongoing process of a planning cycle, reviewing what we intended as our outcome and making small changes each time we go round the cycle, learning as we go. Take small achievable steps. My journey up Kilimanjaro especially near the top, was slow and steady, with steps becoming smaller and smaller with increasing effort due to lack of oxygen and tiredness. We were amazed by an elderly man who reached the top. By just taking steps no more than a few inches each, he reached his goal of standing on the top of Africa.

Plan

Writing plans down is the first step in using the whole of our intellect, the creative right side of our brain being challenged by our logical left to describe words expressing our inner desires, written down they also allow us to share our plans with others increasing our accountability. Writing also allows much more ability for personal reflection. We can look back and see how things have changed (or not). With mobile phones the ability to keep daily reminders and reflections is ever easier. Whenever I have been particularly fed up or frustrated I valued keeping a reflective diary and setting myself small goals to move forward.

So as I end my series on the five fruits of well-being I wish you well in your own journey for improved well-being and satisfying rhythms for life.



NOTES FROM NOHO



"SOMEONE CAME KNOCKING"

BY MARTIN MARPRELATE

I fear there is a hidden abyss somewhere nearby. Last night I woke up suddenly, every nerve paralysed by the euphoric aftershock of a narrow escape. It felt like the jolt of cold consciousness was what saved me – it snapped me back onto the mattress just in time. In truth I don't understand what nearly happened. The only explanation that makes sense of my anxieties is that somehow I discovered a hungry empty space that wants us all inside...

The Dream Diary of MM

An unexpected knock on at the door, on a darkening winter evening. I don't answer knocks like this these days. My hallway is too long and treacherous with stacked junk to make the journey from my kitchen chair for frivolous reasons. I'd rather wait and listen and guess from the tone of the first knock whether there will be a second. Maybe the second knock would be more convincing.

And sure enough, if the first knock was polite then the second was so skilfully urgent that I found I had thrown back my lap blanket and got to my feet before its echo had died in the cluttered, dusty corners of my home. I drew back the curtain and stared out into the filthy twilight. Twisting both locks I swung the door back.

What do you call someone who looked like this stranger? A tramp? A vagrant? 'Special needs' is a common phrase now but the real meaning is vague. You know it when you see it, but you don't really understand it. It looks like someone who costs at least time or at least effort, and probably both. It looks like someone who

needs help. Who would bring that burden to your door?

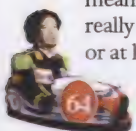
It was some kind of child wearing late middle-age like a poorly assembled disguise. His shirt had come untucked under his misbuttoned cardigan. His anorak hang off one shoulder and his hair was schoolboy scruffed. He looked like he had spent the day leaning his head in the crook of his arm watching a clock tick slowly round to home time.

There was also a moustache: a brief brush of dark hair that was neat but without style, as though it had been issued by the state and - like his clothing - was originally intended for someone else. His dark eyes were sorrowful and pleading without ever quite meeting mine. Too meek. Too innocent by half. I let paranoia handle my risk assessment and it told me my somewhat matured strength and intelligence would be no advantage over this strangest of strangers.

It was someone – something – fearful: an ill-defined face staring back through a misted window; a sudden looming silhouette; a claw reaching cautiously out of the shadows towards me as I wordlessly screamed at myself to wake. My cries came from another dimension and would not travel to my ears or to my loved ones, who remained ignorant of my peril.

The Dream Diary of MM

"I'm ever so sorry to bother you. My phone's got no charge and I can't afford a charger," he held up a small chunk of metal and plastic from a few years ago.



I remembered having a phone like that and spending hours putting music on it which I never listened to because it drained the battery too quickly. I hated it by the time I got rid of it. I wondered where you would get a phone like that now. Didn't they send phones like that to Africa or somewhere? But anyway: can't afford a charger? Run out of credit maybe, that would have had a ring of truth, but *he couldn't afford a charger?*

I know some no-nonsense people who would have confronted the economics of that hard luck story straight away, but he wasn't talking about economics. He was describing living on borrowed time. He was describing living part-time. He was describing the way various aspects of his life dipped in and out of existence because of failure: whether it was his or the state's or his family's failure didn't matter.

Here he was and here he wasn't, knocking on a stranger's door. How many doors had been shut in his face before he ended up in the glow of my hallway light? Half of him was behaving like my eyes were too bright to look at and half of him was dissolving into the cold shadows behind. Half of me felt I should usher him in, feed him and tie his shoelaces but the other half would not allow the offer to be made and silently stood guard.

It was as though any kindness I showed the man would become an unhealing wound of giving. There would be no logical point at which the help should stop. First one thing and then another. There was so much to do that there was no point starting. I made no suggestion about his uncharged phone and waited for him to ask for something specifically. Tell me your story funny little man.

He was unnoticed by all but me and when I tried to describe him, to describe the terror he instilled, it was not merely my vocabulary that failed, but the very ideas I was trying to convey dissolved too. Far from dispelling my fears this only served to grant them an unqualified permanence because although I could not remember why, I could never forget how frightening that apparition was.

The Dream Diary of MM

Then he said something that threw me completely: "Could I borrow your phone to ring my girlfriend?"

I smirked rather too obviously. 'Girlfriend' simply wasn't a word I would have associated with him. I was immediately curious to know if his usage matched mine. I tried to phrase a question in my mind that would shed some light on this unexpected attachment. Clearly she was someone who owned a working telephone which seemed to give her the upper hand in the relationship but who could she be? What manner of woman?

"I need to let her know I got home safely," he explained.

Perhaps she was some maternal spirit who could not help herself. Perhaps she cajoled and nagged him into something resembling normality and the phone call to say he had made it home safely was one of the small dues he paid for her efforts. Perhaps he overlooked her age or her drinking or her drugs or her indifferent husband...

I searched for a question that would draw this story out of him but all I could come up with was a slightly incredulous: "Your girlfriend?"

He chuckled and said, "Yes," as though he could not believe he had one either. I had to know more and there seemed to be only one way I would find out. I told him to wait where he was and fetched my phone.

He comes back. There is knocking in the night. There is knocking while I am not there and my wife takes halting, anxious steps towards the door. He comes back and he comes back and he is there and he is not there. The knocking wakes me in a cold sweat on my travels and the knocking is enough to bring the fear by itself, whether he is there or not there, whether it is him or not him.

The Dream Diary of MM

What was the harm? The only risk I could see was that he might make a dash for it with my fully charged phone in his hand but there was a gate to negotiate. I would catch him when his loose coat caught on it or his shoe came off or his trousers fell down. There was no material risk, nothing to stop me giving a few minutes of call time – lifetime – freely. He didn't look like a runner. I thought that made him safe. It never crossed my mind it was because he didn't have to run.

He began pressing the buttons of his own phone to find his girlfriend's number.

"Hold on, I thought you said you had no charge left?" I challenged him, withdrawing the hand that had my phone in it.

"Ah there's just a tiny bit left and I need that so I can get her number. I didn't want it to die out on me when I was speaking to her. I can't afford a charger, you see..."

He was saying that too much. Why was he saying it so much? It sounded more rehearsed every time I heard it. Why would he try so hard to get such a small favour from me?

"Go on then," I said with the same begrudging tone I used on my children when I was allowing something that I felt better parents would find a reason to refuse. I placed my sleek touchscreen phone in his grubby fingers.

"Thank you so much, it's very kind of you. Thank you so much." His gratitude was celebratory, more appropriate to being handed an Oscar than being handed a Samsung. Clearly if he had a plan it was at this point he felt it had achieved its aim. What had I done?

He enters a room where we all are but only I can see him and only I can hear his voice. He is ravenously dark inside, gulping in light, looming behind a chair and I can't warn the occupant I can only point and weep. They don't see him, they only see me and I am frightening them.

The Dream Diary of MM

I continued to review the situation as he painstakingly prodded the numerical identity of his girlfriend into my phone. This was an odd encounter but apparently harmless enough. I began to silently admonish myself for being such a cynical giver, for being so mean-spirited and suspicious.

"She won't know the number. She might just ignore it. She might just let it ring out," he said to me anxiously with my phone pressed to his ear.



I imagined her sitting in a room with a ringing phone, looking at it, knowing that her boyfriend was going to ring her to report his arrival home, knowing that he couldn't afford a charger for his own phone and yet not answering the call. It didn't seem likely. Why would he think she wouldn't? She would pick up. She did.

His first words to her were: "Don't hang up."

Suddenly a chill passed through me. A number she wouldn't recognise and that plea as a greeting? There was a deception but I wasn't the target, I was the disguise. What had I made possible here?

"I know I said I would stop calling you so much but I've gone home now and I just wanted to let you know I had gone home and..."

She was saying something.

"...I had to borrow a phone from a gentleman because my charge is low so you wouldn't recognise the number, no..."

She was saying something else.

"...I know I said I wouldn't keep calling but I just wanted to tell you I had got home all right because I know you worry. We had a nice time today didn't we?"

She said something short.

"...We did, didn't we. Don't be upset..."

She said something that took a little longer, like something was being carefully explained.

"...I'm sorry I called you again. I know it's worrying getting calls from strange numbers..."

She said something that took around the same time to say as the last something, as though it was being repeated.

"...I promise not to call again. I'm going to bed now anyway. I just wanted to say I had got home all right..."

Again she said something short.

"...Yes I promise I won't call. Not until tomo..."

She said something that cut him off and he listened closely.

"...All right then, not until Wednesday, darling..."

He added the last word cautiously as though he hoped she might not notice it. Then she tried to speak and it was his turn to cut her off.

"Hey, hey..." He had her attention: "I haven't lost you have I?"

She said something short and he repeated his question solemnly in a tone of suitable gravitas for a moment of truth: "I haven't lost you, have I?"

The pause that followed was like a giant black pearl of silence, gleaming magnificently in the air between us. No traffic. No voices. No birds. Nothing but unblemished

emptiness while we waited to see whose heart would be first to take another beat.

It's not him I fear now. It's what he shows me, it's what he drags around behind him for a shadow. It's in his open mouth and his empty eyes. It's the abyss and he carries it around like a disease that is so ingrained you can't tell where it ends and where he begins. It's the abyss I fear because it doesn't just want me, it needs me. It wants me to think I belong there. I think we all belong there.

Dream Diary of MM

She said something.

"It's not so late but I better go because I am on the gentleman's phone. So I won't call you tomorrow but I'll call you on Wednesday. I'm just saying so you know to pick it up in case you don't recognise the number..."

The brevity of her replies now suggested some kind of resignation.

"...Yes, if I need to I'll ring you on Wednesday. I'll talk to you then. Goodnight d-darling. Love. You..."

She said nothing. He looked at my phone, held it to his ear and looked at it again.

"Gone," he smiled.

"Everything all right?" I asked as I reclaimed the handset.

"She was a bit worried. She didn't know it was me. Thank you ever so much for letting me use it. That's very kind. I'll bring you some money tomorrow."

"No, don't," I said coolly as he made his way towards the gate. "Use it to save up for a charger."

"I can't afford a charger," he said with a smile and then he was gone, but he wasn't gone. He'll be back in Noho with all his attractive emptiness and the abyss shining in his dodging eyes, as soon as he can borrow the time...

This piece is a tribute to the following nursery rhyme by Walter de la Mare:

Someone

Some one came knocking
At my wee, small door;
Someone came knocking;
I'm sure-sure-sure;
I listened, I opened,
I looked to left and right,
But nought there was a stirring
In the still dark night;
Only the busy beetle
Tap-tapping in the wall,
Only from the forest
The screech-owl's call,
Only the cricket whistling
While the dewdrops fall,
So I know not who came knocking,
At all, at all, at all.



BLANK STARES & CRICKET CLAPS MAGAZINE

WORDS: GARY INGHAM

DESIGN: JON TARRAN

LAB OF LOVE ...

KEEPING COOL AFLOAT, SPEAKEASY DIY, AND THE THICK END OF THE RED WEDGE: THE LITTLE CLUB WITH THE BIG REPUTATION...

It doesn't look like much. Two terraced houses knocked through into one. Much like any ol' working men's club in any town, nationwide, but if you're going to write about a music venue circa now, which is what I appear to have just started doing, there is only one place in Northampton worth the ink or QWERTY tap: The Legendary Labour Club. On the corner of Earl and Charles Street, the small red-brick club has forged a reputation on the national live venue map in the last few years for prolifically stupendous spoken word, DJ, comedy, and especially, live music events.

Its appearance and title are deceptive, with its humble facade and buzz entry like a Speakeasy. Bands have arrived out of transit vans on Earl Street, looked up at the old signage and turned the air misty blue, but they always want to come back for another gig by the end of the night. The political face of the place can sometimes be a dampener for outsiders, but this isn't exactly the return of Red Wedge. There's no canvassing going on, and if hosting the best gigs in town is how the party intend to attract 'yoof' interest, I'd call that move nothing but shrewd. Miliband should get down there with glow sticks and make the most of it, if he wasn't too busy morphing into an actual egg. You can be politically minded to any degree you see sensible. Personally, I think party politics is an archaic parlour game, but there is still no doubting the unlikelihood of the Conservative Club on Whitworth Road promoting a visit from Bilge Pump, Misty's Big Adventure or Gay Against You anytime soon.

In Northampton, as in most towns, successful regular live music venues have withered of late. The highwater days of

The Soundhaus were abandoned by its owners for The Roadmender, which is still hanging in there, despite becoming akin to a far less than gripping tragi-comedy. Everything that went wrong with these venues in Northampton was caused by arrogance, mismanagement, a bewildering attitude towards promotion, and greed. 'The Lab' has thrived into a hub for the local underground music community in recent years by acting in a polar opposite way. It's almost David and Goliath, though all David had to do was keep his head down, mind his own, and just watch the big fella balls it all up himself.

IDEAS,
PASSION &
NOT BEING AN
ARSEHOLE
ARE WHAT
COUNT
HERE

Mr. Andy Skank.
Post-pigmentation Lee Perry.

The man holding the slingshot is Andy Skank, Jah Almighty of entertainments and soundman at The Lab for longer than anyone cares to question. A modern folk hero. Everybody's uncle. Lee Perry post-pigmentation. Woody Guthrie toasting in a Kingston dancehall. And also sole purveyor of the impressive talent of being able to carry a PA system, a child, and a dog, whilst riding a bicycle.

Mr. Skank knows how to get the most out of The Lab. Nobody off drugs ever complained about the sound there. With the help of a roll call of DIY promoters (Undereducated, Broken Shackle Tabernacle, Masters Of Budvar, Boiler Club, Sunday School, Serious Types, Play Hard Party Harder, Retrotonic & more), nights are run on a budget of shoe strings and spare buttons. ➤



Its an open-house policy without pretension, blessedly free from town centre pressure-cooker aggravations and mainstream irrelevances. Ideas, passion, and not being an arsehole are what counts here. That, and the blind faith that a crowd of people might be interested in life rather than staying home cabbaged in a vortex of pizza rind and Celebrity Jungle Of The Stars On Ice.

It can be a heartbreak affair. I've seen promoters, grown men, overgrown men even, with tear-glazed eyes because only ten people bothered to turn up to the event they had spent the last month hyping ad nauseam to their ten mates. Damp squibs are becoming endangered beasts these days though. Far too many to mention local, national, and international acts of every genre have passed through, astounded, and later returned to reap the beneficial word of mouth results from a

great night at this club. A fine example in recent weeks has been the triumphant return of the skull-crushing Drum Eyes, led by Shige Ishihara (aka DJ Scotch Egg), who, wearing a wool pig hat and brandishing a bunch of broccoli as if it was some cosmic religious deity, delivered a papal blessing to the ear-split congregation. It was a sonic carnival of dual drummers and a burning pyre of keyboards over a bass sound that would make a whale shit the sea bed.

A recent gamble of implementing a door charge has paid off, if not making it a little more bona fide to gig-going snobs. "This is the last plane out of Sarajevo", exclaimed The Boiler Club's Pete Elliott as he introduced the last band at the last regular free show. He can laugh about that now a stage and lighting rig were built since from door profits, and nights are as busy as ever.



Shige Ishihara (aka DJ Scotch Egg)

This ain't high tea at Claridges. This is where the good stuff happens. Where it starts. The lager may well set you running for the cubicle, where the seat is always broken. That's right. So what? This is the real deal. Get down there with a 130 capacity of other good people and we'll all be sweating like porky pig in a Bangkok sauna. If you don't like it, stay home, get your momma to dock your ipod. ■

Search: "Labour Club -The Legendary Northampton venue" on Facebook.

HOW 2 WITH FRED DINEAGE

HOW DO YOU START A BAND?

I expect you heard about my youthful capers in Fred & The Floaters back in '73? We had an act that would knock your dick in the dirt. Yep, my Floaters became legendary through-out Clubland. Alas, it came to a sticky end. A busted flush. But hey, enough of my sepiá tears, let me impart you a few tips, me ol' smegjuice.

1. Pick a name. Make it snappy. "Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra and Tra-La-La Band with Choir"? Nobody likes a smartarse.

2. Avoid musos. Not just in the band, ostracize them from your life. Try and stick to no more than three chords. Five maximum. Any more than that is for the Jazzers.

3. Don't record in a studio unless someone else is paying. Its 2011: you can do it better at home. All local studios jip you and make you sound like a wet fart trapped in a polystyrene box.

4. Avoid interviews, particularly ones that can't be edited beyond recognition. You can easily become misguided into thinking that now people pay and applaud you onstage that you have become witty and your opinions on world affairs, or anything, are important and interesting. Take it from me, as a friend, you're an idiot. You won't find much interview footage of Elvis out there, because he had nothing to say and knew it. And kiddo, you're no Elvis.

AND THAT'S HOW FOR NOW...

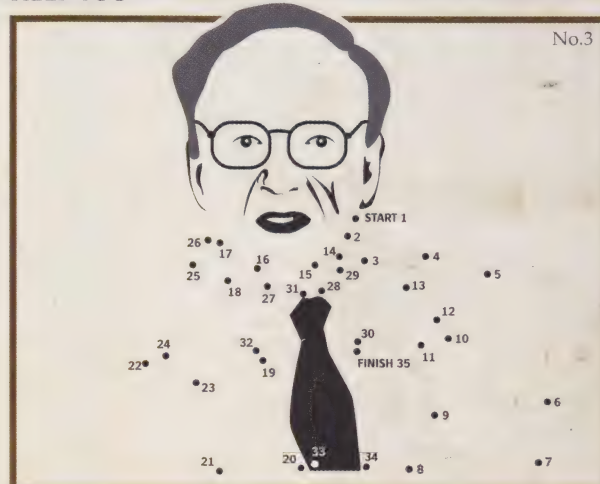
CUT HERE - ASK AN ADULT TO HELP YOU

DOT-TO-DOT DICTATORS Number Three

JOIN THE DOTS...

Join the numbered dots to reveal the reptilious mogul. Colour the picture when it is complete. See below for the solution.

SOLUTION: THE DOT-TO-DOT DICTATOR IS RUPERT MURDOCH



FUCK THE ROYAL WEDDING- TIME TO TAKE TO THE STREETS

by Norman Adams



A packed Northampton Guildhall listened to Mark Serwotka on the need to fight back against this coalition government and the cuts agenda. Mark made the following points:

"The union movement today is different to that of the early 1980s, the last time we faced such an attack on the public sector and the welfare state. Membership is barely over half what it was, and anti-union laws constrain us. This is a reality, but does not fatally undermine the potential for resistance."

Serwotka was well supported when he declared his backing for students, he told the meeting: "While some suggest there is something 'un-British' about the French street mobilisations, the student protests and the high-street tax justice protests have challenged that. Direct action is being organised by a new generation of activists, radicalised by gross injustices. We must not let this passion dissipate."

Mark took time to hammer home the fact that we are a community: "Trade unionists live in households and communities with young people, with those on welfare, with pensioners, with people suffering in both the public and private sectors." He added, "I have consistently said not a single penny needs to be cut and not a single job should be lost. The cuts are not economically necessary; they are a political choice."



He talked about the need for unity saying, "We need unity. To build unity, you cannot accept that someone else's job is expendable or that someone else's rights should be lost. Unity requires solidarity – whether for students, pensioners, welfare recipients, or for public or private sector workers. I do not want to see a pick'n'mix approach to our opposition

"If we want a future with fair pay, decent jobs, security in retirement and a welfare state, now is the moment for trade union members and everyone to shake off their chains and rise like lions."

Mark Serwotka

to the cuts, between "good" cuts and "bad" ones." He made the economic case and asked all to take and read the pamphlet, 'There is an Alternative'.

He made part of the economics case by saying, "People are rightly aggrieved that while they work and pay taxes, many wealthy individuals and companies do not. The Treasury loses an estimated £120bn annually from tax evaded, avoided and uncollected. The fact that the tax justice campaign has moved to the streets is a reflection of the confidence that there is an alternative, and that these unfair cuts must be resisted."



Tracy Morel...
Autism Concern

Northampton Alliance to Defend Services

Northampton, like many other towns and cities around England, is attempting to build a broad-based organisation of citizens to articulate the ALTERNATIVE - to support any that resist the attacks on the services we and our families need or may need at some stage in our lives.

Northampton now has one organisation called Northampton Alliance To Defend Services (NADS) which has to date held two well attended public meetings, has plans for a march and rally on 12th March and is working at expanding contacts in the community and working with community groups.

How well the links between the Trade Unions and the community work will in my view be a major factor in its success. Also, the various active political groupings will need to work together, including my own group, Northampton Save Our Public Service, and others like the Green Party and the Socialist Party plus others. There is a danger of destructive competition and wasteful duplication, and this makes it vital that a basic degree of coordination is established among all those mobilising against the coalition.



Statement of intent: As this is an attack on us all we need to confront it in unity —and rise like lions.

Vodafone as a target.

According to UK Uncut, for the last decade Vodafone has been fighting to avoid paying the UK government £6 billion in tax. Perversely, the Exchequer recently let Vodafone off this bill. UK Uncut states, 'It was one of the most shameless, blatant and costly examples of corporate-government cronyism in years. But at a time when the government are insisting upon massive cuts in public spending, the deal is particularly hard to swallow.'

'When this government let Vodafone get away with not paying a £6bn tax bill earlier this year they sent a very clear message to UK citizens: we are not all in this together. Ordinary people must accept savage public spending cuts, whilst rich corporations can avoid paying billions and billions in tax.'

In the face of cuts to Northampton local services, in particular the eight libraries proposed for closure, a local group of people decided on Sunday 30th January to set up a library in the Vodafone store on Abington Street, Northampton. Seven members of the group brought books to read at the store, as you would do in a library, whilst the other helped hand out leaflets to people passing by and drew attention to the peaceful demonstration. The groups were eventually moved on by the local police force; however, it drew enough attention to Vodafone to make people of Northampton more aware of Vodafone's preferential treatment.



It is clear that in Northampton the battle lines are being set. In St James the local community is fighting to keep its library. Graham Croucher of St James Residents Association (photo above) addressed the meeting on the need to keep our local libraries, and action is being taken to campaign around it. This magazine's own Alan Moore held a reading at the library on February 5th.

The local press reported this with the following: 'A Northampton literary giant has backed campaigners fighting to save their libraries from closure, claiming the town's libraries have helped make him the writer he is today. Alan Moore spoke out at the reading event arranged by those fighting the potential closure of St James Library in Northampton. The library was one of eight libraries in the county earmarked for closure by Northamptonshire County Council due to service cuts. Mr. Moore, who penned Watchmen, said: "I am absolutely against the closure of any library — particularly in the St James area which has had enough taken away from it already. I joined the library in Abington when I was five and all the books available gave me a broad

reading experience — without Northampton's libraries I would not be the writer I am today. I am very concerned about the kids today who might grow up without this access. I am very against taking literacy away from people. Education must not be a privilege for the well-off.'

There are signs that the huge public protests against proposed library closures are making an impact, with Northamptonshire county council withdrawing plans to close any of its libraries, and a number of other local authorities reconsidering their cuts. Northamptonshire had earmarked St James along with others for closure as part of its plans.

A number of other councils have shown signs of dropping their closure proposals in the face of the widespread public protest, which saw 100 events opposing local closures taking place on Save Our Libraries day on February 5th.

In Northampton library supporters will not want to celebrate too soon. Although the council is no longer proposing to shut its libraries, campaigners are worried by some of the council's statements, such as: 'The review could mean libraries becoming community-led, or "volunteering hubs", and some might still be identified for eventual closure.'



Photos by Steve Whiffen

"Walk Like an Egyptian"

Join the TUC march against the cuts on 26 March. Assemble at 11 am at Victoria Embankment for the march to Hyde Park.

In Northampton we are hoping to build the biggest possible turnout at the 26 March demonstration by organising subsidised transport through union branches. We do not intend to exclude the unemployed or the disabled. You do not need to be a trade union member — if you or your family are affected by the cuts, you're welcome to come and make this the turning point. Many recent protests have been built using social media contacts, with a new wave of invitations going out every time someone signs up and tells their friends. If everyone coming on the march were to tell their own social network contacts, we could make this huge. So please take a moment today to invite your own contacts, and help this thing to snowball. Let's get millions on the street. That would be Cameron's nightmare, a real big society with the vision and bravery to transform the institutions at the rotten heart of our system.

THE DESTRUCTOR (REPRISE)

by Alan Moore

This is my last *Notes from Noho* column for a while, so I thought I'd review the rantings of the previous eighteen months to see what (if anything) has changed, and also to check in on life down in the Boroughs one last time before our hopefully brief hiatus.

My first two extravaganzas were entirely given over to the hulking waste incinerator chimney, the Destructor, which presided over Bath Street as an ugly metaphor and turned the sky above the Boroughs black from rim to rim until its demolition in the 1930s, so the news that the Libservatives are planning to roll out a program of new waste incinerators all over the country in the face of outraged protests was received with mixed emotions. On the one hand, it's obviously flattering to think that our political superiors take their cues from scabby underground magazines, but on the other hand I wish they'd read the articles more carefully and hadn't come away with the impression that we thought Destructors were in some way a good thing. That is literally the opposite of what I was attempting to convey, believe me. And that bit in the last issue where I said that our leaders probably use dead pensioners as draft excluders, that was meant as a snide comment and not as a policy suggestion.

As for the main thrust of the articles and the specific areas of neglect they pointed out, it probably won't be a great surprise to learn that very little has been done. St. Katherine's House is still a Towering Inferno just waiting to happen, condemned by the Fire Services, and is still being used by the council to accommodate vulnerable people despite this. Is there something I'm not seeing here, or is that not criminal negligence with a potential to become corporate manslaughter? Are the poor aware that the apparently forthcoming Big Society views them as kindling (again, not a policy suggestion)?

On another front, regarding the two women who had perished after falling from the windows of their Boroughs flats, the news is slightly better. Thanks to Norman Adams bringing up this multiple defenestration at a council meeting it became an issue picked up by the local *Chronicle & Echo*, leading to a full inquiry and to recommended changes in the way the windows are designed. That's a result of sorts, of course, but it does not address the central issue that the Boroughs has been treated as a human dumping ground where normal safety standards aren't applied for pretty much as long as anybody can remember. It's still up in the top two percentile of the U.K. league-tables for deprivation, living there still shaves some ten years from your life expectancy, and yet the euro-millions meant to help those areas that are most deprived has body-swerved the Boroughs, channelled instead into a probably ruinous PFI scheme on the Eastern District. With its streets already mostly blocked by the fantastically effective anti-prostitution bollards, the unfathomable recent narrowing of both Marefair and Gold Street has effectively made the whole place even more inaccessible to motor vehicles, including of course ambulances and fire engines (see the notes upon St. Katherine's House, above). In fact, one could be easily forgiven for assuming that the place is being left to rot deliberately, in order to facilitate some final paving-over of the district with some misjudged tourist-friendly tribute to the actual history that will by that point have been buried under several feet of concrete. Maybe students, who will by then all presumably come from the landed gentry, will get holiday-work dressing up as extinct working-class types, supervising all the rides like the white-knuckle Kerb-Crawl or the quaint Diphtheria Wagon.

Possibly I'm making too much fuss about all this. Perhaps the people in the Boroughs, and in areas like the Boroughs right across the country and indeed the planet, are of no real value, or at least aren't the extraordinary titans that we made them out to be with Mitch and Paul's ace Boroughs photo-shoot in issue #5. It may well be that I'm letting the rosy glow of my home neighbourhood colour my thinking here, until I might as well be talking of a lost Tibetan race of super-humans, so inflated have the underclass scruffs of the district come to be in my opinion.

On the other hand, some of you might have seen the footage on the news around a month ago, where that elderly lady with a handbag sets about a five-strong smash-and-grab gang armed with sledge hammers and, basically, twats the hell out of them. Yeah, you probably saw it, or you heard about it. They had a live interview on CNN, apparently. Well, anyway, the jewellers' shop in question would be Michael Jones the Jewellers at the top of Gold Street, where that Stirling bomber came down in the war, and also the south-eastern corner of the Boroughs. The handbag avenger and now You-Tube heroine is seventy-ish Boroughs resident the beautiful Ann Timpson, who we're proud to say was the recipient of a *Dodgem Logic* hamper this last Christmas. Superhero fans take note that Superman and Wolverine and all those other simpering Jessies are invulnerable, or otherwise possessed of special powers and weapons. Ann had got her handbag, and her background. It'd be a lovely thing if Michael Jones the Jeweller were to make a contribution to the hamper fund next Christmas. I mean, there must have been a good few thousand quid of tasteful bling in that front window, mustn't there? And Ann herself gave her fee from the CNN piece straight to charity. Not that I'm trying to put any pressure on anyone, naturally.

Anyway, that's what's been happening in the Boroughs since we last checked in, and rest assured that one way or another, I'll be keeping you updated. Until then, take care of yourselves, of each other, and of anyone taking a sledge hammer to your social services. Peace out.



Alex Musson.

Web designer by day, comedy mag writer by night. Mustard is photocopied in front of a live studio audience. www.mustardweb.org/alex

**Andrew Waugh.**

Illustrator on Mustard Pages likes to write things and draw funny pictures some of these can be seen at thismeanswaugh.blogspot.com

**Barney Farmer/Lee Healey.**

Writer barneyfarmer@hotmail.com and cartoonist Lee Healey leehealey@btinternet.com have worked together forever, in that time contributing to publications including Viz, Maxim and the one in your hands.

**Claire Ashby.**

I do gardening, artwork, chewing gum and kick ass. Hate politicians and red tape. I like being outside.

**Calluz.**

Loves The GOT Crew and a South African bear

**Dave Hamilton.**

Co-author of the Self sufficientish Bible and selfsufficientish.com. He also works as freelance writer and runs wild food/foraging courses.

RAINBOW NAZIS

David Quantick.

First worked with savage pencil at the NME. Since then he has written television comedy [Brass Eye, TV Burps], radio shows [One, The Beggars Guide] and, most importantly, is the voice of Channel Four's Coach Trip.

**Dick Foreman**

is just an old fashioned girl with an old fashioned mind, not sophisticated, he's the sweet and simple kind. He'd like an old fashioned house with an old fashioned fence and an old fashioned millionaire...

**Ellie Mains**

Ellie Mains was roped into illustrate for Dave Hamilton's articles. Although this is her first ever commission, she has rather enjoyed it and would be willing to do it again.

Contact Eleanor.mains@gmail.com

**Gary Ingham.**

Writer of Blank Stares and Cricket claps fanzine, and chief hassle stirrer of Broken Shackle Tabernacle live music promotions of Northampton. Gary was awarded a certificate for completing the 25 meters front crawl in 1986. www.myspace.com/brokenshackle

**Gary Mills**

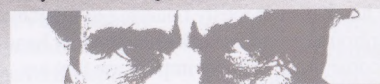
Draws and paints as Plasm (<http://plasmarts.blogspot.com>). Also videotape archivist, occasional writer and walker.

**HOAX.**

Creative team behind Dodgem Logic. www.thisshoax.com

**Jake Black**

D.W. Love has just won the Miss Sewage Pump contest of 1937. He still spray paints baby seals in his spare time.

**John Tarron**

Blank Stares and Cricket Claps Co-Conspirator

**Joe Brown.**

Drew most of the yellow bit on the front. Never one to blow his own trumpet, Joe spends his time doing the impossible. He also nicks other people's brass instruments. [Twitter@joestupidstupid](https://twitter.com/joestupidstupid)

**Kevin O'Neill.**

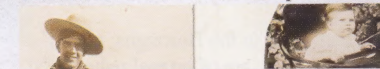
Stone Age comic book artist, who refuses to be dragged beyond the 19th century. Kevin has ink in his veins and dyslexia explains him having the world's largest collection of corn.

**Lewes Herriot**

Birmingham-based artist, writer, moomin. lewesherriot.tumblr.com/

**Melinda Gebbie.**

Former underground cartoonist, professional pornographer, author, sculptress, lecturer and illustrator of Lost Girls (Written by Alan Moore). Melinda now resides in Northampton.

**Margaret Killjoy.**

is an itinerant and adventurer who contributes regularly to Steam Punk magazine and Strangers In a Tangled Wilderness. They have a blog: www.birdsbeforethestorm.net

**Martin Marprelate**

is not Alan Moore. He's just an essentially lazy person who thinks Alan Moore's got nothing better to do than type up his contributor's profile for him. There, I've said it.

**Mike Moorcock**

An Englishman in exile in Texas. He knows everybody and wrote everything.

**Norman Adams.**

is your worst nightmare, unless that's the one where your mum has the head of Gok Wan.



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trade union meml
www.mtshaka

Oscar Zarate

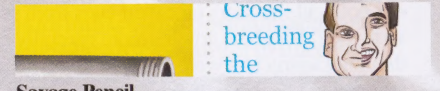
A lonely Gaucho boy who misses the Pampas.

**Robin Ince.**

My fingers are made of 1000 penguin paperback papercuts.

**Simon Cooper.**

Illustrator, GSOH, 21ish, honest, reliable, sort, hairy, likes drawing and colouring in. www.cooperillo.com

**Savage Pencil.**

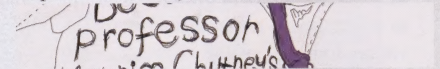
www.savagepencil.com
Email savx@savlab.demon.co.uk

**Steve Aylett.**

Steve Aylett has written books such as LINT, Slaughtermatic and The Inflatable Volunteer, as well as comics like The Caterer and Get That Thing Away From Me.

**Simon Munnery**

Simon Munnery's SELF EMPLOYED will tour throughout the UK until mid May 2011 see <http://simonmunnery.com>

**Spinning Doctors**

Medical practitioners from Northampton

**Tamsyn Payne.**

50% CRAFTS, 40% CAKE, 10% MISCELLANEOUS...all woman..ish

**Tamara Rogers**

'I am a photographer, retoucher and graphic designer. For more information about my work please feel free to contact me at tamara@tamara-rogers.co.uk. Website: www.tamara-rogers.co.uk.'

**Wendi Jarrett.**

Wendi's food for health activities supports a range of local communities and their 'getting to grips with food'. She encourages sharing, teaching and learning. Contact her on 07749873187 or email wendi4news@hotmail.co.uk.



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01604 634385

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01604 636112
Citizens advice Northampton
0870 120 2433

CAN Northampton
01604 622121
Housing and debt advice
Northampton 01604 623700

Homelessness
www.kirkbytrust.org.uk
Northampton Volunteers Centre
01604 637522



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